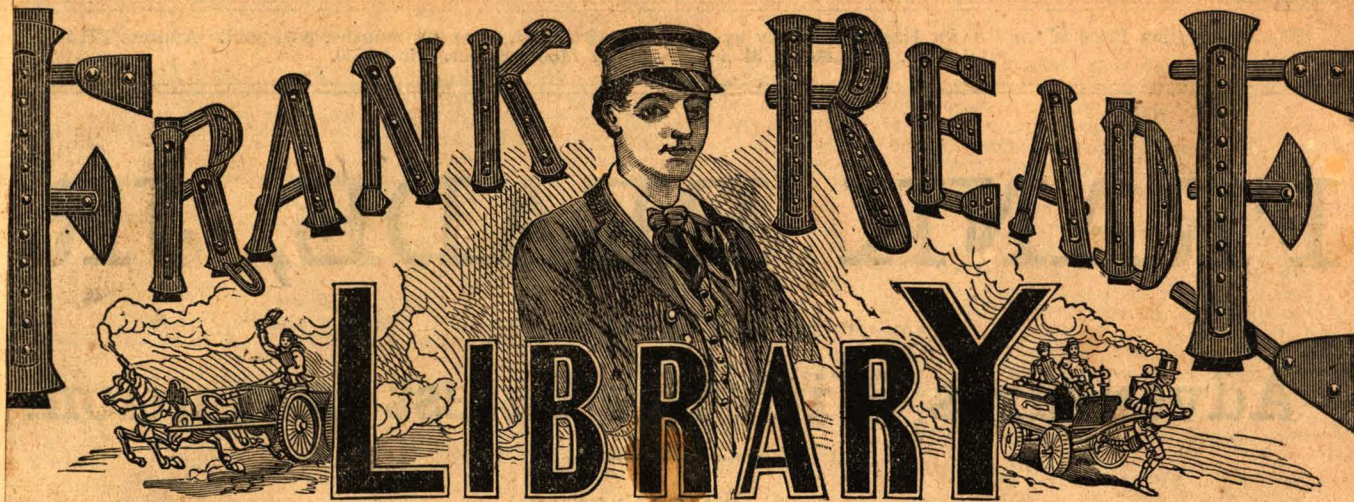


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Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, October 5, 1892.

No. 24. { COMPLETE. }

FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 & 36 NORTH MOORE STREET, NEW YORK.
New York, March 4, 1893.

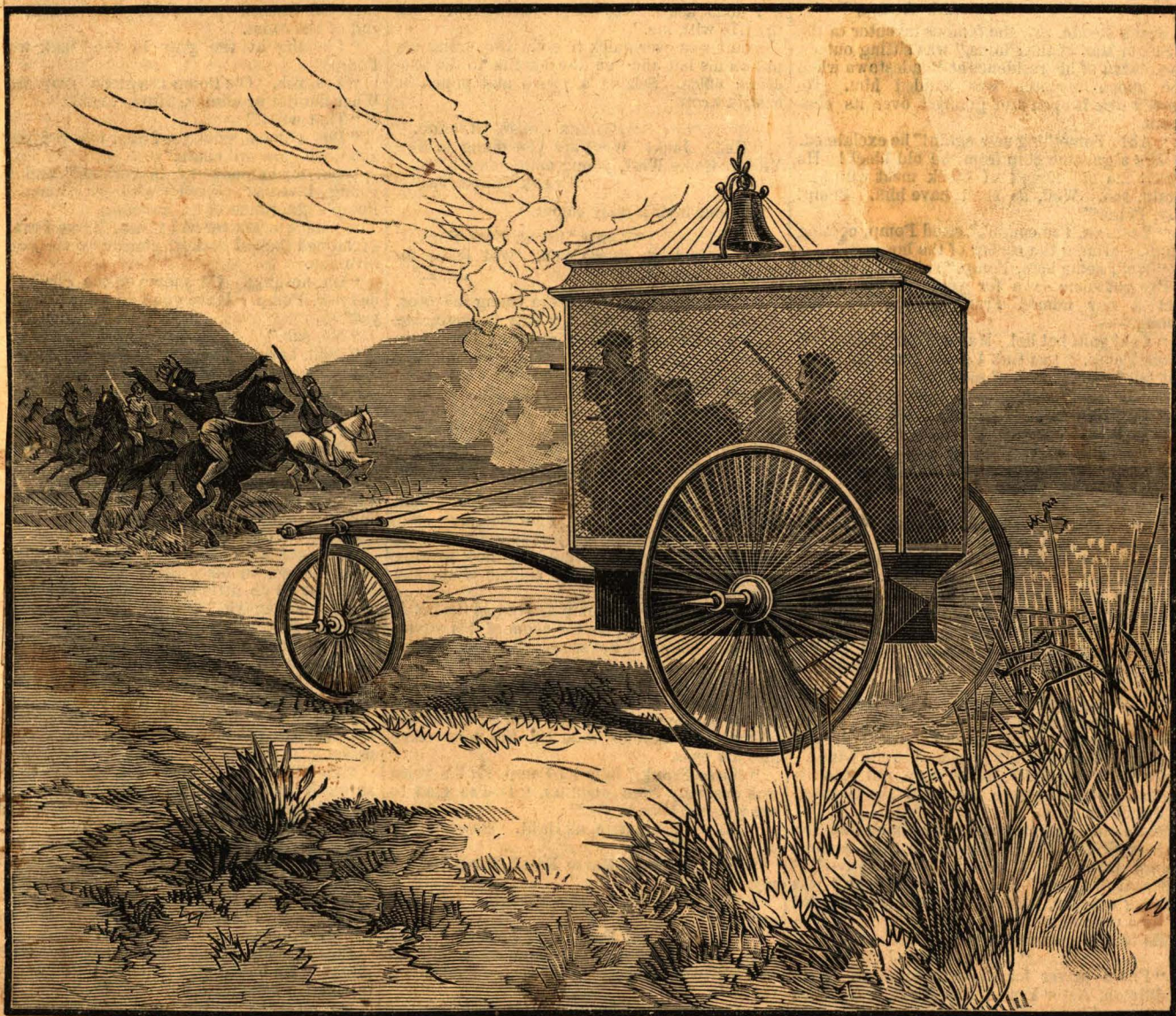
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Vol. I

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Frank Reade, Jr., AND HIS ADVENTURES WITH HIS LATEST INVENTION.

By "NONAME."



With yells of terror the savages urged their ponies to the top of their speed. They fly over the plains on the wings of the wind, but the tricycle sails along behind them close enough for the terrible Winchesters to do their work.

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FRANK READE, JR.,

— AND HIS —

Adventures With His Latest Invention.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade Jr.'s Deep Sea Diver the 'Tortoise,'" "Frank Reade, Jr., and His Electric Boat," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG INVENTOR.

"PALMER HOUSE, CHICAGO, June 15.

"TO FRANK READE, SR., Readestown:

"Send Pomp here at once. I have just capped the climax of inventions.

"FRANK READE, JR."

Frank Reade, Sr., the famous inventor of the "Steam Man of the Plains," was sitting out on the piazza of his residence at Readestown when the above dispatch was handed him. He hastily tore it open and glanced over its contents.

"Ah! Something new again!" he exclaimed. "He's a genuine chip from the old block! He wants the old chunk of block meat with him again, too. Well, he shall have him. Pomp! Say, Pomp!"

"Yes, sah, I se comin'," cried Pomp, coming quickly around the corner of the house.

"Well, come here, Pomp," said the old man. "I've got some news for you. Do you recollect a boy named Frank Reade, Jr., the young—"

"Yah! yah! he! he! Marse Frank," laughed black Pomp, "you tink I done gone an' forgit dat boy? De good Lor' sabe us!"

"Ah! you remember him, then, do you?"

"Yes, sah, I does," and the black face had a grin on it that revealed two big rows of ivory.

"Well, that same boy is up to another racket. See here. He telegraphs for you to go to him at the Palmer House in Chicago at once. Which means to-night."

Pomp's eyes stretched their widest when the dispatch was read to him.

"Will you go, Pomp?" Mr. Reade asked.

"Yes, sah," was the prompt reply.

"Very well. Get ready, and I will go down to the telegraph office and send a dispatch to the effect that you will start to-night."

"Yes, sah," and he hastened round to his cabin to make the necessary preparations for departure.

Mr. Reade strolled down to the telegraph office, and was about to write a message to the young inventor, when another dispatch, this time from New York, was placed in his hands.

He read it carefully, folded it up, put it in his pocket, and then wrote and sent the dispatch to Frank, Jr.

Seated in his sumptuous apartment at the Palmer House, Frank Reade, Jr., the famous young inventor of the "Steam Tally-Ho," "Steam Wonder," and "Electric Boat," was reading a paper, when a dispatch was handed in by a messenger boy.

He tore it open and read:

"READESTOWN, June 15th.

"Pomp leaves for Chicago to-night. Jack Middleton, Astor House, New York, telegraphs for your address. Success to you.

"FRANK READE, SR."

"Holy smoke!" he exclaimed. "Jack Middleton in New York! I thought he was in Turkey by this time. He went to Europe two months ago, to be gone a year. Bet my bottom dime he's got into some kind of a scrape, and had to come back. He's a wild one, but one of the best fellows in the world. Hanged if I don't ask him to come out here and make the trip with me."

Frank was ever quick to act. He sprang up, put on his hat and ran down-stairs to the telegraph office. Seizing a pencil and paper, he hastily wrote:

"PALMER HOUSE, CHICAGO.

"Hello, Jack! What are you doing in New York? Come West, young man, come West."

"FRANK READE, JR."

An hour later a reply came:

"ASTOR HOUSE, NEW YORK.

"I came back to see you. Will leave for Chicago to-night."

JACK."

"Well, now!" exclaimed the young inventor, on reading the dispatch. "This is beginning to get interesting. Jack went to Europe to spend a year, and now, after two months, comes back to see me. I wonder what it all means? Well, he'll be here day after to-morrow, and then I will give him a surprise, though, and Pomp too. The faithful old fellow will be here to-morrow morning. I'll have some fun with both of them, and then let 'em into the secret."

The reader will readily recognize Frank Reade, Jr., and his faithful man Pomp.

The young inventor had just completed a new and startling invention, and was now waiting for Jack Middleton, an old college chum and classmate, to arrive.

The next morning Pomp arrived at the hotel, and was shown up to the room of his young master. They had not seen each other for three months.

"Hello, Pomp!" the young inventor cried, as the familiar black face entered his room. "Glad to see you, old man!" and he wrung the horny hand of the old man till the tears came into his eyes.

"Marse Frank," faltered Pomp, for his voice was unsteady from emotion, "I—I se glad to see youse. How is yer?"

"All right, old man, all right. How are they all at home?"

"Dey's all well, Marse Frank," was the reply.

"Glad to hear it. You are looking well yourself."

"Yes, sah. Ole Pomp ain't dead yit." And then he looked around the room, as if half expecting to see something of the new invention there.

"Dis am a gorjus room, Marse Frank," he remarked.

"Yes, quite a nice room, Pomp. One can keep pretty comfortable here."

"Yes, sah, he kin. Dis heah ain't like libin' out on de prairy, eh?"

"Oh, no, of course not; but there's more fun out on the prairie, though, eh?"

"Yes, sah, dere is," and then the old man surveyed himself in a full-length mirror at one end of the room.

"Looking at the gray in the black wool, Pomp?"

"Yes, sah. Ole Pomp is a gittin' gray, suah. Whar am dat ar climax, Marse Frank?"

"That what?"

"Dat climax what yer father tole me youse hab done gone an' made."

"Oh, my climax of inventions!" and the young inventor roared with merriment at Pomp's ignorance of his meaning.

"What's de matter wid youse, Marse Frank?" exclaimed the old darkey, glaring at the young inventor.

"Oh, nothing. I'll show you the climax to-morrow, Pomp. Have you had your breakfast yet?"

"No, sah."

"Well, here's two dollars. You can have the day to yourself. Knock around and see the sights. You can get a good breakfast in the kitchen of the hotel down-stairs."

"Yes, sah," and Pomp moved out and went down-stairs to the servants' department, where he was served with a good meal.

He strolled around the city during the day, and took in the sights. But when night came he found that his pocket had been picked of all his loose change.

"Dis heah am de beatenest town I ebber see," he exclaimed, on discovering his loss. "Now dey's got all de little change I had, but de big change is dar yit," and he grinned a grin of complete satisfaction.

A pick-pocket heard it and attempted to get into the darkey's confidence, but Pomp wouldn't have it. The thief then waited for an opportunity to down him and go through him.

Tipping the wink to a pal, they both seized him and tried to hold him till they secured his wallet.

"Hole on dar!" cried Pomp, exerting a strength that utterly amazed the rascals.

He knocked both of them down and gave them black eyes.

They didn't wait to renew his acquaintance, as they saw they had got the wrong sow by the ear.

Springing to their feet, they ran like race-horses down the street, disappearing in a narrow alley.

Pomp really didn't know what the attack meant. He had opposed force with force, an instinctive habit with him.

He returned to the hotel and reported to Frank, Jr., his adventures of the day.

"You got off a great deal better than most white men do, Pomp," said the young man. "You are lucky."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp. "Wish dat I done broke dere necks, suah."

"Well, if they ran away I am quite sure you didn't do that. You have to keep your eyes open in Chicago."

"Yes, sah—it am er bad place, Marse Frank."

"A very bad place with a great many good people in it."

"Am dere any good folks heah?" Pomp innocently asked.

"Oh, yes, thousands of them," was the reply.

Pomp then tried again to ascertain what the young inventor had sent for him for. But Frank shook his head.

"Wait till to-morrow, Pomp," he said, "and then you'll find out everything. Jack Middleton will be here to-morrow, and he will go with us."

"Go whar, Marse Frank?"

"Out West—on the plains."

"Why, Marse Frank! Is yer gwine out dar agin?"

"Yes—all over the West, old man. Indians, robbers, buffaloes, bears, and all that sort of thing."

"De Lor' sabe us! Whar am Barney O'Shea, Marse Frank?"

"I don't know where Barney is, Pomp. We shall not have any use for him if we did. Three of us will be enough."

Pomp went up to his room that night and fell asleep over the problem of what the climax was.

CHAPTER II.

JACK ARRIVES—THE ELECTRIC TRICYCLE.

THE next day after Pomp's arrival Jack Middleton, the old classmate of the young inventor, reached the Palmer House. He sent his card up to Frank's room, and the servant came back with instructions to show the gentleman up.

"Jack, old man, how are you?" exclaimed Frank, grasping his chum's hand as he entered the room. "I am deuced glad to see you! How have you been?"

"Never better in my life, Frank; and you are looking as hearty as a buck," and the two friends stood up and looked at each other several minutes, as if noting the changes that time had made since last they met.

"Take a seat, Jack, and make yourself comfortable," said Frank. "Have you had breakfast yet?"

"Yes—and a good night's sleep on the train. I am feeling quite comfortable."

"Glad to hear that. Now tell me what has made such a change in your programme? You wrote me that you were off to Europe for a year, and yet—"

"I am back here at the end of two months, you say," said Jack, interrupting him.

"Yes," replied Frank, "that's just the proper statement of the situation."

"Well, I came all the way back to see you, Frank, old man."

"See me?"

"Yes, you, and no one else."

"Well, that's news. Go on with the music."

"I was in Germany about two weeks, when, at a scientific exhibition in Berlin, I saw an offer of a prize of \$100,000 for the invention of a certain machine. I inquired of the persons in charge of the exhibition, and found that the offer was made in good faith, and that one of the wealthiest houses in the empire was at the back of it. I at once thought of you, Frank, and set my wits at work to find out what the result of such an invention would be. I was told that letters patent would be granted the inventor, and that an immense income would come to him as long as he lived. Satisfied on that head, I immediately returned to New York, and telegraphed to your father for your address."

"Now hold up, Jack," said Frank, as he was about to speak again. "I know now what you would say. You want me to try to invent the machine for you."

"Yes, that's it, and go in with me in it."

"Exactly. Now listen to me. I have just

completed the greatest invention of the age. I am so full of it that it's utterly impossible to think of any new invention at present. I am going out on the plains, among the Indians and buffaloes. You are going with me. We'll have a splendid time, and when we return, I promise you that I will do my best to do what you wish me to. In the meantime, don't tell me what it is, for I don't want anything to spoil my fun with this thing I already have on hand."

"Why, what in the world is it, Frank?" exclaimed Jack, catching some of the young inventor's enthusiasm.

"Well, now, you'd never guess it, would you?"

"No. I might guess a thousand things, and never mention the right one."

"So you would. I am sure you will never guess the right one. Well, it's a new tricycle."

"A tricycle?"

"Yes. You know what a tricycle is, do you not?"

"Of course I do, but—"

"Well, that's what it is."

Jack could not repress a smile.

"And you call one of those little three-wheeled concerns the boys use all over the country one of the greatest inventions of the age?"

"Yes, I do. It is run by electricity, and will carry from four to six men with ease over the ground at a speed of thirty miles an hour."

"Jerusalem!" exclaimed Jack, amazed at the sudden revelation of his skill.

"Yes. Now come on with me and I will show it to you."

"I am at your service, old fellow, but hadn't you better take my project in hand and—"

"No—no, not now. I am going to work my tricycle first. Come on."

They put on their hats and left the hotel together.

Out in front they met Pomp, and he and Jack greeted each other with great cordiality, for Pomp had been Jack's body-servant and body-guard while he was at college.

"Come on, Pomp," said Frank, "we are going to see the climax."

Pomp fell in very promptly, for he was as anxious to see the new thing as Jack was.

Frank led the way down to the little workshop on the lake-shore, where he built and launched the electric boat the year before. On the way down he explained to Jack that a little boy dashing by him on a little tricycle one day put the idea into his head. He had already demonstrated the power of electricity in the electric boat, and now thought he had invented something that would revolutionize travel in the West.

When they reached the little work-shop Frank produced a key, fitted it to the lock and threw open the wide double doors.

"There she is—look at her," he exclaimed, and they did look at it. They walked around it a half dozen times with the most puzzled looks Frank had ever seen on two faces.

Pomp looked at the tricycle a minute or two, and then at the young inventor.

"Am dis er climax, Marse Frank?" he asked.

Jack and Frank chuckled.

"It's a tricycle, Pomp."

"Er trysickness?"

"No—tricycle—a rame for a three-wheeled concern. It's run by electricity just as the electric boat was. That beat everything on the water. This will beat everything on land."

"How?"

"It will run thirty miles an hour on the ground, and—"

"Marse Frank," said Pomp, shaking his head, "youse gwine fo' ter broke your neck! You heah dat?"

"Well, see that my grave's kept green when I do, old man. The Tally-Ho, Steam Wonder and Electric Boat were all to break my neck, but it isn't broken yet."

"No, sah, dat's er fac," admitted Pomp, gazing at the machine with a puzzled air.

Jack Middleton gazed at the tricycle in rapt admiration. He could not understand all he saw, but he waited for Frank to explain it to him.

He saw a fine steel frame of a tricycle—or

three-wheeled concern, one wheel in front and two behind. The one in front was about three feet high, and worked on a pivot so as to turn to the right or left. The two wheels behind were at least six feet in diameter, with a broad, thin steel tire, very strong and yet very light.

In the center of the axle-tree were two elbows, with piston-rod attachments by which the propelling power was given. The machinery was inclosed in a zinc box underneath to prevent injury by dust or other causes. Above was what appeared to him to be a wire cage, which seemed to be a cage within a cage, and still a third one. The wires were small and the orifices fine, yet one could plainly see through it. It was large enough to hold four persons. On the sides of the wire cage were slides made to uncover and cover holes a couple of inches in diameter. On the rear side was a door, which Frank opened, and said:

"Now come inside and I will explain it to you."

They followed him in, and found three nicely-cushioned folding stools, which Frank offered as seats. They sat down and looked around them. On the right and left sides were chests running the entire length of the cage, and in front was a number of silver-plated knobs and handles, connecting with slender steel rods, evidently comprising the machinery of the thing.

"Now," said Frank, as his eyes sparkled, "I've got the biggest thing here in America. This cage here is entirely bullet-proof. There is nothing but a cannon that can send a ball through it. I've had it tested. It's of the finest elastic steel, against which a ball will flatten and drop to the ground. Hence, you see, there is absolute safety inside here. Now, see these knobs and handles here? This one marked 'G' guides that single wheel out there in front, turning it in any direction wanted. See?" and he turned the handle, and the wheel turned right and left with noiseless motions.

"This one marked 'P' connects with a powerful electric battery and machinery in the zinc-covered box underneath this cage, and sets the thing going. This one marked 'B' runs it backward when needed, and this one, 'L,' controls a powerful electric light on top of the cage there, which is strong enough to enable one to read an ordinary paper on a dark night a half mile away. This one, marked 'S,' means shock—it sends a current of electricity throughout the whole thing strong enough to kill a man. Inside here, however, we are shut off from that, as I have so constructed the cage that the inside material is non-conducting. Suppose a body of enemies were to seize the tricycle to detain us, or turn it over. I could kill the whole band as by a stroke of lightning."

"Good Heavens!" gasped Jack. "It's a terrible machine."

"Yes, indeed. Over my head here, where I sit when running it, hangs a fireman's bell, which I have placed there for effect, and to give notice of our approach sometimes. These chests here on either side are to hold supplies for a long trip, blankets, ammunition, arms and such things. They can be used as seats too, when so desired. These holes here, covered by wire slides, are for the rifles when we want to shoot without exposing ourselves. So you see we can visit even the most hostile tribes of Indians and have no fears, and wherever a wagon can go, we can follow, no matter where. Now I will give you a test of the impregnability of the cage," and stepping outside, he drew his revolver, and, aiming at Jack, fired. Then he fired at Pomp.

Both leaped up as if hit, and yelled:

"Hold up! Stop that!"

Frank laughed and emptied his revolver at them.

When he ceased firing there were six mashed bullets on the floor, underneath the tricycle.

CHAPTER III.

OUT ON THE PLAINS—AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

JACK and Pomp sprang out, and ran round to see what effect the bullets had had on the wire cage. They were both amazed beyond the

power of expression when Frank picked up the mashed bullets and handed them to them.

Pomp drew a long breath of relief.

"I wur afraid I wur done gone dead," he said. "I nebber did like ter be shot."

"Well, no one can ever shoot you in there, old man."

"No, sah, dat's er fac!" and Pomp stared at the tricycle as the most wonderful thing that had ever been invented.

"It beats the Tally-Ho, eh, old man?" Frank remarked.

"Yes, sah."

"And the Steam Wonder and Electric Boat, too!"

"Yes, sah, all ob dem."

"The old folks at home will open their eyes, eh?"

"Yes, sah, and yer fader will grin wuss'n a wolf."

Frank smiled.

Pomp always thought a wolf could show more teeth when he grinned than any known animal.

"Well, we'll start for Readestown in the morning, at sunrise, and after a day or two there will make for the open prairie. You must stay here, Pomp, till Jack and I come back. We will go up-town and buy some supplies. When they come, store them away in these two chests here. But don't you go to fooling with any of those knobs and handles up there, or you may set the thing going and play the old Harry. You haven't got the hang of it yet."

"No, sah, I ain't gwin ter do nuffin' wid it," said Pomp, moving a little further off from it, as if suspicious of the whole business.

Jack accompanied the young inventor up-town, and aided him in the purchase of supplies, which were at once sent down to Pomp.

When they returned, they found that Pomp had stored everything in the proper place, and was sitting down by the door of the shop enjoying his pipe.

"Now, Pomp," said Frank, "you must sleep here to-night. You will find blankets in the left-hand side chest."

"Yes, sah."

Had Frank told him to jump into the lake he would have done so. He believed in the young inventor, and would as soon have thought of flying as of disobeying an order of his.

"We will return at sunrise and start for Readestown, so you must get up early and have your breakfast by that time."

"Yes, sah."

Frank and Jack then went back to the hotel, ate a hearty supper together, and then went to the theater.

They paid their hotel bills before going to bed, and gave orders to be called at an early hour.

Some time before sunrise they started down to the little shop where the electric tricycle was waiting for them. Pomp was up and had just finished a cold breakfast which he had purchased the night before.

"All ready, Pomp?"

"Yes, sah."

The two young men deposited their valises in the cage, and then turned their attention to pushing the tricycle out into the street. They got it out, and then entered the cage.

Frank seated himself in front of the machinery where he could see ahead and guide the tricycle, and turned the "P" knob.

The electric power immediately began moving, and the tricycle started. It went smooth as any carriage could move, and climbed the hill to the main street with perfect ease.

In the main street it moved faster—ten miles an hour, for there was no traffic on the streets at that early hour, and only the street cars and milk wagons were going.

The few mechanics who were going to work at that early hour stopped and gazed with puzzled looks at the strange vehicle. They gazed as long as they could see it, and then went on, thinking it was something new, of which they would hear more in time.

At last they reached the suburbs of the city, where they struck the level country roads.

"Now we'll make 'better time,'" said Frank, and, giving the "P" knob another twist, sent

the tricycle flying along the smooth road like a railroad engine.

"De Lor' sabs us! Stop her, Marse Frank," cried Pomp.

"Why, Pomp, old man, this is nothing. Wait till we get out on the prairie, and we'll go so fast you'll have to tie your hair on your head to keep it."

"Frank, old boy!" said Jack, as they dashed along the smooth road, "this is certainly a wonderful invention."

"Of course it is. But you don't know half of what it can do yet."

It was late in the afternoon when they came in sight of Readestown.

"Now we'll wake up the whole place," said Frank. "Stand up here and ring this bell, Pomp, and I'll take a ride through Main street, and let 'em rack their brains to find out what it is."

Pomp began ringing the bell as soon as they struck the end of the street. The tricycle dashed through at good speed.

The sound of a strange bell in their streets caused men, women and children to rush out to see what it was. Of course it had just passed as they got a look at it. But they all suspected that Frank Reade, Jr., had turned up with something new, and accordingly set out on a run toward the Reade residence.

There they found the strange machine, with the young inventor hugging and kissing his mother and sisters. A big crowd soon collected, and everybody wanted to know what it was.

"Frank, my boy," said the elder Reade, "come out here now and tell us all about it."

The crowd cheered as the young inventor came forward. He then began and told them all about it, and they were amazed at the resources of his inventive mind.

"We are going out on the plains to-morrow," he said, in conclusion, "and when we come back we will tell you all we have seen and heard."

That night Pomp carried to the tricycle three Winchester repeating rifles and plenty of cartridges, and saw that nothing was wanted.

Early the next morning Frank and Jack took leave of the family and started.

The tricycle bell told that they were off, and in a few minutes the village of Readestown lay behind them. The sun was not yet up and the dew was still heavy on the grass.

"By George, Frank?" cried Jack, "this is the most exhilarating ride I ever had! The air of the prairies is good!"

"The best in the world."

They were going in a southwesterly direction. Frank had made the trip so often that he knew just which way to go.

All day long they sped over the rolling prairies, and night found them nearly two hundred miles from Readestown. But the darkness did not stop them. They had provisions on board, and so did not have to stop to cook supper. Frank flashed the electric light from the top of the tricycle, and the reflector threw its concentrated rays in front with such intense power as to enable them to see objects plainly for a quarter of a mile ahead.

"Frank Reade!" exclaimed Jack, in admiration of the inventive genius of his friend, "this is the greatest invention of the age! It's complete—nothing else desired!"

"Fills the bill,—eh?" said Frank, smiling.

"Yes—and more, too."

By midnight they had made another hundred miles.

"We are in the Indian region now," said Frank.

"Not the Indian Territory?"

"Oh, no, but in that part of the great plains where bands of red-skins pass and repass in their hunting or marauding expeditions."

Suddenly Pomp startled them with an exclamation of:

"Good Lor', look dar!"

Both sprang to the front and gazed forward. Intense darkness reigned everywhere except in front.

The glare of the electric light revealed to their astonished gaze a band of mounted In-

dians over one hundred strong, hideous in all the repulsiveness of war-paint.

"Indians, by Jove!" exclaimed Jack.

"Yes," said Frank; "but they can't harm us. Our cage is bullet-proof. We'll go through them!"

The red-skins sat on their horses, rifles poised as if to be in readiness to quickly fire, and gazed in mystified awe at the blinding light that shone full in their faces.

The glare was so intense that they could see nothing else—could not tell whether it was receding, coming, or stationary. The tricycle approached them rapidly and almost noiselessly.

Seeing that the savages did not give way Frank quietly halted, and gazed at them, within forty yards of them. They were so blinded by the electric light that they did not see the tricycle.

"Ugh!" grunted the chief, blinking his eyes. "Big light. Injun see all light."

A feeling of awe, curiosity and superstitious fear was plainly depicted on each hideously-painted face. The steady glare of the electric light blinded the whole band, and Frank was beginning to think about removing the reflector, when the chief called out:

"Ugh! Me great chief! Who light? Injun can't see. Ugh!"

CHAPTER IV.

SHOCKING THE RED-SKINS.

THE situation was an exciting one.

The red-skins were perfectly hideous in their war-paint. Every mother's son of them held his rifle in readiness to shoot at anything they could see.

The glare of the electric light had utterly blinded them. They could not even see the shape of the strange vehicle that bore it.

Frank and Jack, however, could see them well, and neither of them saw anything handsome about them. They gazed in silence, waiting to see what the bewildered red-skins would do.

Those of them who moved out of the range of the light rubbed their eyes and glared at total darkness. Then they jabbered among themselves, as if in the greatest state of mystification.

Frank had been so often among the red-men that he readily understood everything that was said.

"By George!" he whispered to Jack, "they are the worst scared set I ever saw."

"Suppose they should fire a volley at us?"

"Well, unless you are leaning against the wire it won't do you any harm. The wire gives a little, you know."

"Yes, I never thought of that. Have you tested it?"

"Oh, yes. Everything is safe as though we were behind a stone wall."

The reds heard the whispering, or some of them did, and a signal caused a silence like death to fall on the jabbering warriors. They gazed at the blinding light, winked their eyes, and listened.

Frank reached up and commenced tolling the bell that hung just above his head.

It's clear, sweet, silvery notes swelled out on the air of that still summer night, filling the savage mind with wonder and awe. They had never heard anything like it before, and, of course, didn't know what it was, or what to make of it.

"Ding! ding! ding!" went the bell, and the awe-stricken reds sat motionless and silent under its silvery tones.

"Hello, red-skins!" Frank suddenly called out. "What's the matter with you?"

"Ugh!" grunted the chief of the band. "Pale-face light!"

Frank quickly reversed the reflector, flooding the scene with a brilliant light in every direction, when, after a few moments, the astonished red-skins beheld, for the first time, the curious machine that had crept up into their midst.

Exclamations in the shape of grunts burst

from the surprised red-skins. They crowded around the tricycle, and glared at the three men inside with unfeigned amazement.

"Who pale-face?" the chief asked.

"I am Frank Reade," was the good-natured reply of the young inventor. "Who are you?"

"Me great chief—me Red Horse."

"Oh, you are Red Horse, are you? Well, I must say you are not handsome."

"Ugh! Pale-face heap big lie. Red Horse great chief!"

"Oh, no doubt of that. Why don't you wash your face and look decent?"

"Ugh!" grunted the chief. "Pale-face heap talk."

"I say, Red Horse, what do you think of that light up there?"

The chief glared up at the electric light, but a moment later recoiled from it. It was too much for him.

"Ugh! Light strong like the sun," was the red-skin's comment.

The band had completely surrounded the tricycle, and were examining it with a great deal of interest.

"Ugh!" grunted one—"no horse—all wagon."

Red Horse turned to Frank and asked:

"Where horse?"

"What horse?"

"Horse who pull wagon?"

"Oh, we don't have any horse."

"No horse?"

"No. Our wagon runs without horses."

"Ugh!" grunted the chief. "Pale-face big liar."

"Red Horse is a fool," said Frank.

"Pale-face lose his scalp," said Red Horse.

"If I do Red Horse won't get it."

"Me get it," and the chief rode up alongside of the tricycle and struck the wire cage savagely with his tomahawk.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Frank. "Red Horse wants to dance a war-dance. He can never get a pale-face scalp till he dances a war-dance."

"Me shoot pale-face, and get his scalp!" exclaimed the angry red-skin, leveling his rifle and firing at Frank.

The entire band yelled in unison at the shot. But a moment later, when they saw Frank standing unmoved in the center of the cage, their yells gave way to grunts of amazement.

Red Horse gazed at him for a moment like one in a dream. Then he uttered a war-whoop, in which he was joined by the entire band, followed by a whole volley of rifle-shots.

Of course, every shot fell to the ground from the sides of the steel wire-cage, and our heroes remained unharmed.

"Don't you see what a fool you are, Red Horse?" said Frank, laughing good-naturedly.

"You can't hurt a pale-face in this thing."

"Me take wagon," grunted Red Horse, "and burn it in fire—roast pale face."

"Oh, you can't burn the wagon, either," said Frank. "You red-skins are all fools, and you'll find it out soon, too."

Red Horse gave a signal to his braves, and a score of them leapt to the ground and laid hold of the tricycle to hold it and prevent it getting away from them.

"Now look out for fun, Jack," said Frank, touching a small crank that connected with the electric battery.

The next instant a powerful current of electricity flashed through all the outer portions of the tricycle. The savages caught the full force of it, and the most ear-splitting yells that ever came from human lips burst from them. Their bodies twisted and squirmed like impaled worms. They could not let go, for the sudden convulsions that had seized upon them caused them to grip all the harder.

Lord, how they yelled! They screamed in unfeigned terror. Red Horse and his other braves knew not the cause of their yells of terror, and yet they drew their tomahawks and yelled in unison with them.

"De Lord sabe us!" exclaimed Pomp. "Dem red niggers is done gone crazy, suah!"

"Let 'em go, Frank," cried Jack. "You'll kill the whole gang."

"Not much," replied the young inventor.

"I know just how much to give them."

The yelling rascals at last sank down in convulsions. Frank then stopped the current of electricity, and let them go.

They tumbled to the ground, some of them so badly used up that they couldn't stand on their feet for several minutes.

But those who could stand rubbed themselves all over, as if to make sure they had not been shaken to pieces. They had a wonderful tale to tell, and their grunts told more than the language of civilization could have done.

"Catch on, Red Horse," called out Frank. "The wagon will run away if you don't."

To make the chief lay his hands on the tricycle Frank caused it to move slowly forward.

Thinking his prize was about to escape him, Red Horse sprang to the ground, and seized hold of the left wheel.

"Now for him!" cried Frank, turning on the current again.

"Ugh! ah—whoop!" roared the red rascal.

His hideously painted face became even more than hideous in the convulsive grimaces that followed. His mouth flew open and his eyes protruded as though they were about to pop out of his head. He squirmed and twisted like a serpent with its head under a stone. Yell after yell burst from him, and his hair stood up like quills on the porcupine.

Suddenly he became utterly unconscious, and then Frank stopped the current of electricity, and let him fall to the ground.

During this scene the wildest excitement prevailed among the band of red-skins. They ran hither and thither, making the welkin ring with their blood-curdling yells.

Just as the chief fell to the ground Frank commenced ringing the bell, and at the same time started the tricycle forward. Of course the red rascals dared not stop it, and in a few minutes it was careering over the plains at a rapid rate.

CHAPTER V.

"STRUCK BY LIGHTNING."

JACK and Frank laughed till the tears came into their eyes at the terror of the red-skins when the electric shocks struck them.

"I never saw anything like it in my life, Frank," said Jack, holding his sides. "I've nearly split my sides laughing."

"So have I," returned Frank. "I arranged the electric current for just such a trick as that. I knew the red rascals would try to stop me some time, and so I wanted to give them a good dose."

"They'll never forget it, I'll bet."

"Oh, they will take a good deal of hard knocks before they will give up. As none were killed, they will think that we can't kill. And then we have run away from them. They will think we are really afraid of them. Oh, we'll hear from them again, you may depend upon it."

"Can you kill any one with that current, Frank?"

"Why, yes; as effectually as a flash of lightning can."

Jack shuddered.

"It's a terrible weapon," he said.

"Yes," said Frank. "It's a defense that will save us when the rascals seize hold to turn us over."

"Do you think they will follow us?"

"Yes—I am sure of it, and that's why I am not going any faster. I want to keep just ahead of them, and let them think they can run us down."

"But why not get away from them altogether?"

"Oh, I want a little fun out of them, and teach 'em a lesson that will have a tendency to let white people alone. Do you know, Jack, that while they are much sinned against, they are incorrigible thieves and murderers!"

"Yes, I have heard so."

"Well, I know they are. That band would have murdered us to-night if they could."

"No doubt of it."

"Not in the least."

Frank slowed up after going a few miles, and listened.

Away in the distance he could hear] the

muffled roar of a hundred horses rushing after him in hot pursuit.

"There! Don't you hear 'em coming?" he said. "They are following the light."

Jack and Pomp both listened, and could plainly hear the horses' feet on the soft prairie soil as they dashed after the tricycle.

"Why, they won't let us have any sleep to-night," said Jack.

"No. They are determined to capture us if they can. I've a mind to wait and see what they will try to do."

"I don't know what else you can do," remarked Jack.

"Heah dem er comin'," exclaimed Pomp.

A couple of miles behind they uttered the fiercest war-whoops, and urged their steeds forward to the top of their speed.

The tricycle came to a dead halt, and Jack and Frank, seating themselves on camp-stools, lit cigars and began smoking. Pomp was too intent on watching for the re-appearance of the Indians to indulge in a smoke.

Suddenly Pomp sung out:

"Heah dey come!"

They came on like a thunderbolt, yelling like so many demons, and quickly surrounded the tricycle.

"Hello, Red Horse!" cried Frank on seeing the chief again. "How do you feel now?"

"Ugh! Red Horse want fight!" exclaimed the chief. "Me great chief; me take pale-face scalp!"

"See here, Red Horse, don't be a fool!" said Frank. "You know I can whip you, and not try hard either, so go away and let me alone!"

"Pale-face coward. He run away from Red Horse. Red Horse great warrior. All his enemies fly before him!"

"Just hear the rascal!" said Frank. "I've a mind to give him a bullet for his insolence!"

"Oh, don't shoot him. We are safe enough," said Jack, having no desire to see any one of the band killed.

"We'll have to kill some of them in order to get rid of them," Frank said, shaking his head. "You see, I know these rascals, Jack."

"Well, maybe they'll leave us at daybreak," Jack returned; "let's wait till then, at least."

Frank agreed. "We may as well lie down and sleep then," said Frank.

"All right. They can't get at us, so there's no danger in doing so."

"None in the least."

They took their blankets from the stationary chest, on the right hand side, and proceeded to make a bed on the floor of the cage. The Indians saw the movement, and were amazed. They could not believe that the three men in the tricycle would dare to go to sleep with over one hundred enemies, all armed to the teeth, around them.

Just before he laid down Frank sent the electric current flashing through the out-surface of the tricycle, and then said:

"Now they may do their worst. They'll get a lesson that will make them remember this racket as long as they live. I've given 'em enough to knock 'em clean through eternity, if they only dare make the circuit in their own bodies."

"Good Lord!" gasped Jack. "That's awful, Frank!"

"So it is, Jack, but you forget that those fiends are itching to get their hands in our hair. No; I don't mind killing Indians any more than coyotes. They are both alike."

Jack Middleton could not sleep after that. He lay there thinking about the death-yell he expected every minute to hear. He knew not that one would not have time to yell. A man struck by a full-fledged streak of lightning never stops to make any noise about it. He hastens into eternity at once, and stands not on the order of going.

The Indians, enraged at the insult, as they conceived it to be, of the three men lying down to sleep, fired a volley of rifle balls at the cage. Of course the balls fell harmless to the ground, and Frank and Jack remained quiet on their blankets.

Pomp, however, remained on his knees,

peeping over one of the chests at the red-skins who were holding a consultation over the situation. They were already convinced that it was worse than useless to waste powder and lead on the tricycle.

They concluded at last to turn it over—do it so quickly that no harm could come to themselves in the meantime.

Accordingly, a half-dozen stalwart red-skins crept up to the left side to seize and turn it over on its side before the occupants could do anything to prevent it.

As was stated, Pomp was down on his knees watching their movements. He saw them approach to take hold. His wool almost straightened out like a horse's mane at the thoughts of what was about to take place.

"Look out, dar!" he gasped. "Ain't you red niggers got no sense? Look out, dar, I tole you! De Lor' Gorramitey!"

Both Jack and Frank sprang up to look.

The six savages who had laid hands on the tricycle were instantly killed.

They dropped to the ground in their tracks, and remained as motionless as only the dead can.

"By George," exclaimed Jack, "they are as dead as herring!"

"Of course they are. They were struck by lightning."

The chief suspected something wrong by the silence of the six men. He crept forward and gazed at them. A glance told him they were dead, and then a wild, shrill whoop escaped him.

The others joined him with their yells, and a minute later the whole band fled in terror from a mystery that killed.

"Ah! They have got the lesson!" exclaimed Frank, as he heard their howls growing fainter as the distance increased. "They will never forget it; but the very next band we meet will have to learn it as they did. I tell you, Jack, they are the worst fiends outside of old Nick's abode."

"I believe you, Frank. They were the most repulsive-looking things I ever saw in human shape."

"You may well say that. Now we can lie down and get some sleep," and they again sought their blankets.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BREAKFAST AND ITS INTERRUPTION.

It was daylight when they awoke. The sun was not yet above the horizon. But the stars had faded away, and the dew-drops on the grass began to glitter like so many pendant diamonds. A fragrant odor of flowers was wafted on a gentle zephyr to the cage of the tricycle, and Jack, inhaling it, exclaimed:

"This is Paradise, Frank! I am intoxicated with this delicious ozone!"

"Whar am it, Marse Jack?" asked Pomp, looking around as if in search of something.

"Waat?" demanded Jack, in no little surprise.

"Dat dar nozone."

Frank and Jack roared.

"What's de matter wid youse?" Pomp asked, in a state of complete mystification.

"Oh, Lord!" gasped Frank, as he looked up at Pomp, "I shall burst!" and he exploded again.

"Ef youse don't stop dat laffin' youse bust suah," remarked Pomp, not yet showing the sign of a grin on his black face.

"Pomp," said Jack, "you do not know what ozone is, do you?"

"No, sah."

"Never saw any, eh?"

"No, sah—nebber got any, eider."

"Well, I'll tell you what it is."

"Yes, sah," and Pomp stared at him as if expecting a wonderful revelation of some kind.

"It means good, pure, fresh air."

Pomp gave a snort of contempt that nearly threw them into convulsions again.

"Ef I was you, Marse Jack," said Pomp, "I wouldn't use dem big words no more."

"Why not, Pomp?"

"Kase dey'll choke yer some day, an' den yer'll be sorry yer did," and with that he turned

his attention toward getting breakfast for the two young men.

"I say, Jack," said Frank, "I think I see the faintest fringe of timber right in front of us here. Suppose we run over there and have a hot breakfast?"

"Good! I don't care to eat breakfast with a half-dozen dead Indians lying around in sight."

"Here we go, then."

Frank touched the knob that controlled the powerful electric engine, and in another moment the tricycle was dashing over the prairie like a streak of greased lightning.

It only took them about thirty minutes to reach the timber. They halted on the edge of it, and then Pomp sprang out with a shot-gun to shoot some prairie chickens he had seen just below where they stopped.

Bang! bang! went both barrels of his gun, and in a couple of minutes more he returned with four fowls which he had brought down out of a flock.

"By George," exclaimed Jack, "I like that kind of sport! Let's try our hand at hunting whilst Pomp gets up a fire for us."

"Yes, make a good fire, Pomp, and we'll go a little way down the timber and get some more of those birds."

"Yes, sah," responded the faithful darkey, preparing to start a fire against a log that lay just in the edge of the timber.

Jack and Frank then shouldered shot-guns and game-bags and started out. They had not gone a hundred yards ere they were in the midst of a fine flock of prairie hens. They emptied their guns into the flock and brought down nearly a dozen birds.

They reloaded and followed the flock again, after filling their bags with the game.

Again did they bag a half score of birds, and now, having as many as they could well carry, they concluded to return, eat a hearty breakfast, and then resume the hunt.

Pomp had built a big fire against a log and was busy plucking a brace of the prairie chickens when the two young men returned.

"Do you want any help there, Pomp?" Frank asked, looking over at his faithful help.

"No, sah, 'less youse mighty hongry, sah," was the reply.

"Well, I'm pretty hungry, so I'll help you," and, as he understood all about cooking game, he set to work helping the black pluck the birds.

In the meantime Jack watched the fire and arranged the smaller chunks so as to have them reduced to live coals as soon as possible.

When four of the birds were ready for the knife Pomp took them to the stream, which was but a few rods farther in the timber, and cut them open, washed them out, and returned. Salting them well, and adding a liberal sprinkling of pepper, he laid them on the glowing coals.

"Ah! they will be good enough for a king!" exclaimed Jack.

"Indeed they are," said Frank. "They are fresh and fat, and this pure air of the boundless prairie gives one an appetite for such game. As we are not in a hurry we will stop here and have a good day's hunt. I think we can kill game enough to last us a week and more besides. Don't they smell good?"

The odor of the broiling birds was extremely appetizing, and Jack enjoyed inhaling it. He watched Pomp's way of cooking, and took his first lesson in the art.

When they were nearly ready for the plates, the faithful black went to the larder in the cage and took therefrom several plates and placed them on the log. Then he got cups and saucers, knives, forks, and spoons.

"We'll have to wait for the coffee, Jack," said Frank, "so let's take a walk to the creek," and see what kind of a stream it is. We can return in ten minutes. Pomp will give us a signal when the coffee is ready."

"All right," said Jack, turning to follow him.

"Better take yer guns," said Pomp. "Dem Injuns mout be ober dar."

"Yes, that's so; let's get the Winchester's, Jack," said Frank, as he went back into the tricycle and got them.

Each with a Winchester repeating rifle on his shoulder, they sauntered through the timber toward the creek. The fragrant odor of the broiling birds followed them.

"By George, Frank," exclaimed Jack, "the odor of those birds is strong enough to draw all the wolves for five miles around."

"Yes; and if it was night there would be at least a hundred of them prowling around and snuffing the air. They don't prowl much in the day-time unless driven by extreme hunger."

They reached the banks of the creek, which was about twenty feet or more in width and of an unknown depth.

"I guess there's plenty of fish here," remarked Jack.

"Yes. These prairie streams are full of fish."

"By Heavens! look there!" cried Jack, starting suddenly, and pointing to a dark object on the other side of the creek.

"It's a bear!"

"Yes, and a big one too!"

The bear had come down to the creek either to get a drink of water or else ascertain something about the good odor that filled the woods. He looked at our two heroes in a way that plainly said he was seriously inclined to come over and shake paws with them.

"Jack," said Frank, "it's your first bear. Let him have a bullet right in his eye. A bullet in the brain will down anything in the animal world. Take good aim. Don't get nervous!"

Crack! went the Winchester, and Bruin rolled over with a fierce growl, clawing savagely everything within his reach.

"That got him!" cried Frank. "He's your bear! He's a monster, too!"

Just then Pomp's signal notified them that breakfast was ready.

They waited till they saw Bruin stretch out his limbs and give up the ghost, and then turned to go back to the camp.

They found the coffee and broiled prairie fowls delicious, and sat over against the log ready to devour all that Pomp could place before them.

The log was hollow, with the butt-end split. As Jack sat over the edge of the split, eating a wing of the fowl, he gave a start, then leaped to his feet with an exclamation. The next moment the head of a young white girl protruded through the split in the log, and glared at Jack with an eager, scared look.

CHAPTER VII.

OUT OF A LOG.

As they gazed at the face of the young girl, Frank and Jack were rooted to the spot in perfect dumfounded amazement.

There was a wild, hunted look in her eyes.

"Oh, I am roasting in here!" she moaned.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake take me out and let me go—Why, you are white men!"

"Yes—yes—white men and friends, miss?" cried Frank, darting forward and catching her in his arms. "We are friends—yes, you are safe—safe!" he repeated, as he dragged her out of the hollow of the log and stood her on her feet.

"Thank God!" she cried, and then she burst into tears and sank down on the soft grass, too weak from joy to stand.

"Ah!" said Frank, you are weak from thirst and hunger. Here, Pomp, run to the creek and fetch some water."

Pomp snatched up a tin cup and hastened to the creek, whence he returned a few minutes later with a cup of clear water. She drank it eagerly, and said:

"Thank you. I feel better now," and as she spoke she gazed up at Frank and Jack, as if to read their thoughts in regard to herself.

She was a beautiful girl of some sixteen or seventeen years of age, with large blue eyes and auburn hair. Her teeth were like pearls behind ruby lips.

"In Heaven's name, young lady," said Frank, "tell us how you came to be in such a fix!"

"Oh, it's horrible!" she exclaimed, with a shudder. "A band of Indians stole me from the wagon train two days ago, and were carry

ing me away. As they were passing here last night, I watched my chance and darted away into the bushes. It was so dark they could not see me to pursue, and I wandered ever so long without knowing where I was going. At last I heard them coming toward me, and I struck against this log in my endeavor to get away. I felt of it, and found this hollow, and crept into it. I have been there ever since. When I first heard your voices I thought you were Indians, and kept perfectly still. But the fire then began to burn through to the inside, and to escape death by fire I came out. Oh, I thank God I am saved!"

"Amen!" said Frank, tears in his eyes and a choking sensation in his throat.

"I know you must be hungry, miss," said Jack. "Here is a broiled fowl, and bread and coffee. Let me beg you to help yourself."

"Thanks, sir. I am indeed hungry."

"Then eat with us— Ah! you would like to bathe your face and hands. Pomp, bring the basin full of water and a towel."

Pomp promptly obeyed, and the young girl had the pleasure of soap, water and a clean towel before eating. She looked so much handsomer after washing her face and hands that Jack gazed on her with silent admiration.

Then she sat on a camp-stool and ate heartily.

"Oh, this is delicious!" she said, as she partook of the fowl.

"Yes," said Jack. "Pomp is a splendid cook, and knows how to get up a tempting dish, man though he is."

Pomp grinned from ear to ear at the compliment to his culinary skill. He was proud of his cooking.

"It's the first bit of food I have tasted in twenty-four hours," she said.

"Then you *must* be hungry. But didn't your captors give you any food?"

"They offered me some, but I was too low-spirited to eat. I would have thanked one of them if he had raised a tomahawk to kill me."

"Yes—yes—I know. I can appreciate your feelings," said Frank.

"Did they ever capture *you*, sir?" the girl asked.

"Yes, once, and such was my experience among them that I have resolved never to be taken alive by them again."

"But, sir, how could you help yourself if a dozen or more were to come upon you now?"

"Do you see that cage on three wheels, miss?" he asked, pointing toward the tricycle.

"Yes sir."

"Well, inside of that we can defy all the Indians in America."

She looked at him in surprise.

"It's a wire cage which no bullet can penetrate," Frank added.

"But can they not take it and carry it away, too?"

"No. In that covered box underneath is a powerful electric battery, by means of which I can send a current of electricity all round the tricycle strong enough to shake all the meat off an Indian's bones."

"Good heavens, sir!" she exclaimed, glaring up at the young inventor. "Who are you?"

"My name is Frank Reade, miss."

"Ah, I thought so," a bright, happy look coming in her eyes. "I have read about your Steam Tally-Ho, and my uncle, who lives down on White River, wrote my father a long account of it two years ago. As soon as you mentioned the strange things about the electricity I at once thought of what my uncle had written to my father."

"Ah, I am glad you know me, then," said Frank, "for you will not have any fear as to—"

"Oh, I would trust you anywhere, both of you," she said, interrupting him; "your faces show that you are incapable of being other than gentlemen. There, now, I have eaten a hearty breakfast, and am ever so much obliged to you for it," and she handed the empty plate and cup to Pomp.

"I am glad you have enjoyed it, Miss—"

"Hammond," she said, interrupting him again. "My name is Ella Hammond."

Both Frank and Jack acknowledged the introduction, and then they sat down to hear the history of her capture from her own lips, whilst Pomp busied himself with putting the dishes away after washing.

It was the old, old story of the plains; of a party of sneaking red-skins prowling around the camp of the emigrants, waiting for a chance to rob and plunder. She had gone to the little spring alone, just a few paces from the camp, in the edge of a narrow strip of timber, when she was seized from behind, a hand pressed firmly over her mouth to stifle her screams, whilst a pair of strong arms bore her away into the woods.

"That's the old, old game," said Frank, when she had finished her story. "They intended either to hold you for a large ransom, or else their chief would make you his wife. You have made a narrow escape, Miss Hammond."

"Yes, sir. I know it," and she gave a shudder as she thought of it; "and I shall never forget your kindness to me at such a time."

"Ah! We could not have done otherwise, Miss Hammond. Don't say a word about gratitude unless you ascribe your rescue to a higher power than man's. Just before you made your appearance we shot and killed a huge bear over on the other side of the creek. Pomp and I will go over there after his hams and skin, and when we return we will start for White River."

"Oh, will you?" cried the delighted girl.

"Yes—we will deliver you to your people as soon as possible."

"Oh, I am so glad! I know my father is terribly distressed about me."

"And your mother?"

"Mother is dead," she said, in a sad, tearful tone.

"How you must miss her. But never mind, we'll soon make your father's heart glad. Come, Pomp," and Frank led the way toward the creek.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIGHT BY THE CREEK.

The young inventor left Jack with the tricycle and the young girl. He knew he could trust Jack with the machine, and also that he was as brave as the bravest and an ugly customer in a scrimmage.

He and Pomp soon crossed the creek, and found the bear just where he had fallen. He was a huge one, and had died hard. The immense paws had scratched the ground in a terrible manner, showing tremendous strength and savage ferocity.

"Dat am a whopper, Marse Frank," said Pomp, on beholding him.

"Yes, he was a big one; Jack brought him down with one shot."

They found that the terrible Winchester repeating rifle had sent the bullet clear through his head.

"No beast can live with a bullet in his brain," remarked Frank.

"Dat's er fac'. It makes 'em mighty sick, I tote you."

"Yes, an elephant will yield to a small buck-shot if you send it crashing through his brain."

Pomp took hold of one of the immense paws and proceeded to turn the dead brute on its back, when Frank made the startling discovery that somebody had already commenced the process of skinning. The work had evidently been abandoned with precipitation.

"Look dar, Marse Frank!" exclaimed Pomp, pointing toward the incision that already had been made with a sharp knife.

"Yes, I see it, Pomp," remarked Frank.

"Somebody has been here ahead of us. Our coming must have driven them away. Don't look as though you suspected anything wrong, but go to work and I'll stand guard for you."

"Yes, sah," and the brave old darkey, who had been in many a fight with the red niggers, as he called them, knowing he had on a brace of revolvers, and that Frank was a dead-shot, went to work at skinning the dead bear.

He worked faithfully, whilst Frank, from a

clump of bushes behind him, kept watch and guard over him.

Suddenly Frank saw the end of a feather shaking behind a tree some fifty yards away from the spot where the bear lay. He instantly knew that it was a feather in the head-dress of an Indian, and kept his Winchester in readiness to fire at a moment's warning. He never moved, however, and was determined to make no cause for trouble unless forced to do so.

But in less than five minutes he discovered no less than seven Indians concealed behind trees, peeping cautiously around at Pomp. They were puzzled, no doubt, to know what had become of the pale-face, and were waiting for an opportunity to spring out and capture both.

But Frank, being concealed in the thicket, puzzled them not a little. They resolved, however, to make a dash and capture Pomp and then hunt for the pale-face.

Accordingly they sprang up at a signal and made a dash toward Pomp.

"Look out, Pomp!" said Frank, in low tones. "Let 'em come!"

Pomp looked up from his work, and saw them speeding toward him.

He quickly drew his revolver, and waited for them to come up. They were so confident of success from sheer force of numbers that they never raised a rifle to fire.

"Now!" cried Frank to his faithful Pomp, and the next moment he commenced with his Winchester.

Crack! crack! crack! and three red-skins tumbled to the earth in less than ten seconds.

The red rascals expected that one or two shots would be fired, and that then all would be over in the capture of the two, hence they did not stop on hearing the shots—that is, those who were unhurt did not. Those who were hit tumbled quickly.

Crack! crack! crack! went Pomp's revolver, and two more went down—a third turned away with a broken arm.

There was only one now unhurt, and he did not know that he was alone till he was within ten feet of the young inventor.

Then on finding himself covered with the pale-face's rifle, he halted and glared at him as though he expected the next moment to be his last.

The smile on Frank's face caused the rascal to look around, and finding five of his six companions lying on the ground, grunted:

"Ugh! Pale-face shot all Injuns!"

"Yes; they are all down but two of you," replied Frank.

Pomp, on seeing that the right arm of the wounded red-skin was broken, dashed forward and barred his way.

"Heah, you red nigger!" he cried, "stop dar, I tote yer!"

"Ugh! Me take black-face's scalp!" and the savage drew his tomahawk with his left hand and rushed at him.

Pomp met him half way, and gave him such a thump in his stomach with his head as to stretch him senseless on the ground.

"Dar, now. Dat lays yer out!" and then the aroused black disarmed him.

The savage whom Frank had brought to a halt stood with folded arms across his breast, glaring defiantly at his conqueror.

"Do you surrender, red-skin?" Frank asked.

"No," was the reply.

"Want to fight, eh?"

"Me fight pale-face—me great brave."

Frank had him covered—had the drop on him—but did not wish to shoot him down in a cold-blooded way, although he knew he deserved to be shot like a dog.

"Well," said Frank, "why don't you pitch in and fight? I am ready."

The black eyes of the wily savage flashed back the intelligence that he fully understood the situation.

He was waiting for the moment when Frank would be off his guard. But the young inventor was not to be caught napping; he kept his enemy covered till Pomp came up, after having butted the life out of the sixth Indian.

"Pomp," he said, "give that fellow a touch with your battering-ram."

The Indian dared not take his eyes off the

young pale-face. Pomp, therefore, had a fair whack at him. He lowered his woolly head and made a quick run; he struck him in the back and knocked him nearly twenty feet into the creek.

"By George, Pomp!" exclaimed Frank; "you've settled him!"

"Yes, sah! He won't get ober dat, suah!"

Being knocked insensible, the rascal drowned ere he came to the surface again.

"That ends the band, then. It was better than I had hoped for. Now we'll finish the skinning of the bear. Jack and the young lady must be very uneasy about us."

"Yes, sah, dey is; but dere ain't no Indians heah now but dead uns."

"That's true. Go to work here; give me that knife a moment."

Pomp handed him the knife, and then they both went to work with a will.

It took them some time to divest the huge brute of his overcoat. But they finally got it off, and then they cut off the two hams.

The skin was so heavy that it was as much as one could carry. Pomp took it on his shoulder, rolled up like a huge carpet, whilst Frank carried one of the hams. They crossed the creek where it was shallow, and then made their way to camp. There they found that Jack, on hearing the shots, had placed the young girl and himself inside the cage, to prevent a surprise by any foe that might put in an appearance.

"Hello!" cried Jack, on seeing them; "you are all right, are you?"

"Yes—right side up with care. What are you doing in there?"

"Nothing. We didn't know what all that shooting was about, so we came in here to be on the safe side."

"And you did right. Once inside you are safe from any danger from man. See there, what a fine bear ham we have."

He threw the ham on the ground by the fire, where Pomp laid the skin.

"Yes, it's a fine one. Where's the other one?"

"Pomp will go after it. It was too heavy to carry both."

When Pomp returned Jack and Frank had spread the bear skin over the top of the cage, with the fleshy side up to the sun.

"That will protect us from the sun," said Frank, "as well as cure the skin."

"Yes, that's so. It's a good idea, Frank. But how will we cure these two big hams?"

"Very easily. This bracing air will cure meat very quickly. We'll salt them well and hang them up on that hook out there. That's all we'll have to do."

Pomp hung up the hams after washing all the blood off and salting them.

"Now we'll start for White River," said Frank.

Camp stools were folded and put away in the chest, and then the tricycle moved away from the timber.

CHAPTER IX.

FUN WITH THE RED-SKINS.

WORDS fail in attempting to describe the astonishment of Ella Hammond at the performance of the tricycle. She looked at the young inventor as though he were a god.

"Oh, Mr. Reade!" she exclaimed, with girlish enthusiasm, "this is more wonderful than steamcars or steamboats!"

"So I think, Miss Hammond," he said, with pardonable pride.

"Mercy, how fast we are going!" she exclaimed, as they bounded over the dead level sea of green grass at a tremendous rate of speed.

"Yes, we are going fast. We could keep up with a train of cars if we could find a good road to run on."

"Can you go over the hills, too?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, if not too rough. We can go anywhere a wagon can go."

"Well, well, this is wonderful!"

"It is delightful, too," remarked Jack.

"Perfectly delicious!" she exclaimed, and

then she gazed away on the right, where she caught sight of a band of mounted Indians.

"Oh, look there!" she cried. "There are more Indians!"

"Yes," said Frank, looking in that direction, "they are Indians."

"You can go faster than they can, and—"

"Don't be uneasy, Miss Hammond," he said, interrupting her. "They can do us no harm. Pomp and I killed seven of the red rascals over on the creek when we went after the bear skin."

"Oh, mercy!"

"The deuce!" exclaimed Jack. "Was that the cause of that firing?"

"Yes. My Winchester gave me the advantage. Five of them were dropped ere they knew that any one had been hurt."

"Well, well, I only wish I had been along to have a hand in it."

"Oh, you'll have all the fun in that line that you want before we go back home."

"Oh, Mr. Reade, you are going right toward those Indians!" cried Miss Hammond, growing very nervous.

"Yes, we are going to have some fun with 'em," said Frank. "Don't be uneasy, for you must know I would not run you into any danger whatever. They cannot harm us. No bullet can reach us in this cage. Do you see this?" and he pushed the wire slide that enabled him to thrust the muzzle of his rifle through. "We can fire and *kill* without incurring the least bit of danger. Just be easy and we'll have some fun with the red rascals."

As the tricycle reached a point within a quarter of a mile of the band of Indians, who numbered something like two score, he paid out about one hundred feet of plaited wire from a metal cylinder. The wire dragged through the grass behind as though it were in danger of being lost.

The Indians, on seeing the tricycle approaching them, thought that a prize had dropped down in their midst. They didn't know just what kind of a prize it was, but knew that it was some kind of a vehicle.

When it stopped within fifty yards of them they made a sudden rush and surrounded it.

"Ugh!" grunted the chief, gazing at the tricycle. "No horse; all wagon!"

"Hello, chief!" cried Frank, good-naturedly. "How's your wife and mother-in-law?"

"Ugh! Who pale-face?"

"Oh, I'm a little boy out for a holiday. Who are you?"

"Me great chief. Get out of wagon. Me talk to you."

"Excuse me, chief. I never get out when Indians are around. You see there's a pretty girl in here and we have lots of money, so we can't think of opening the door."

"Ugh! Me open it!" angrily exclaimed the old rascal, dismounting from his horse and going up to the vehicle.

He laid a hand on the knob of the wire door and shook it. Then he laid the other hand on the tire of the great wheel on his left to brace himself for a tremendous effort.

Frank turned on the electrical current, and the next moment the chief felt a shock as if lightning had struck him, and he was hauled a considerable distance from the tricycle.

"Ugh!" he grunted, pulling himself together and looking as though he would like very much to know what it was that struck him.

"Try it again, chief," said Frank. "Come in and have a talk with us."

"Ugh! Me open wagon," and the untutored son of the aborigines again seized the knob with both hands. This time his fingers closed over it, and the electrical current caused him to grasp it with a tenacious grip.

Then he let out a blood-curdling yell, and his eyes protruded as though about to pop out of his head. He squirmed and twisted worse than ever did a contortionist, yelling as though in a death-struggle with the evil one himself. His braves saw that he was in some kind of trouble, and rushed to his side. His whoops meant fight, and so they seized hold of the tricycle and were themselves caught by the current.

Then pandemonium broke loose. Miss Hammond gazed on their distorted countenances

with horror, whilst Frank, Jack, and Pomp laughed and enjoyed the racket.

Suddenly Frank cut off the current. The writhing mass of copper-colored humanity fell down in a heap, and slowly the different ones pulled themselves together again.

But the expression of wonder that was seen on their countenances made Jack and Frank roll in convulsions on the floor of the cage. Even Miss Hammond laughed. She could not help it. It was *too* comical.

The chief rose to his feet, and gazing at the wonderful tricycle, asked:

"What pale-face do?"

"Oh, I didn't do anything at all," said Frank.

"I merely made me a wagon that Indians can't steal, that's all."

"Ugh! Pale-face heap big liar."

"Well, maybe I am, but you can't take my wagon, can you? Take hold of it. You can have it if you can take it."

"Indian don't want wagon—no horse."

"Oh, all right then, you don't want it, eh?"

"No—Injun want scalp," and with that the old rascal raised his rifle and took deliberate aim at Frank. The young inventor stood unmoved and smiled.

Crack!

He smiled.

"The chief is a fool. He can't hit a man ten feet from him!"

Amazed that he did not kill the pale-face, the old chief seized another rifle and fired, and with the same result.

"Now, chief, you have tried twice to kill me. Now if you shoot at me again I'll give you a bullet that'll make you sick!"

Crack! went another rifle.

Frank drew a revolver, pushed aside the slide, and fired through the little hole.

A yell followed, and the chief fell dead under the feet of his horse.

CHAPTER X.

"DEATH ON INJUNS."

ON seeing their chief fall the red-skins grew perfectly wild in their rage. They whooped and yelled like so many demons, and every one of them took a shot at the young men in the cage.

Of course their bullets fell harmlessly to the ground, and the inmates of the cage smiled in absolute security.

"It's no use, red-skins!" said Frank, laughing. "If you don't let white people alone, you will all be destroyed. I could slay every one of you now if I wanted to."

"Ugh! Pale-face heap talk, big coward," replied one of the red rascals. "Come out and fight."

"Oh, you are very brave now, aren't you? There are forty of you, and yet you want me to come out and fight the whole band."

"No, me fight—me take your scalp," replied the challenger.

"Oh, you will, eh? Well, let your men ride off a half mile and wait till the fight is over, and I will come out and settle you."

"Pale-face coward. He won't fight," and with that he turned his back toward the tricycle, and Frank promptly sent a bullet through his head.

Then the red-skins opened fire again, riding around the tricycle and firing as fast as they could load.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Hammond," said Frank to Ella, as he saw how pale she was. "Nothing can harm us now. You see what fiends they are, and can pardon us if we serve them just as they are now trying to serve us."

"Oh—yes—I won't say a word if you were to kill every Indian in the world."

"Then we will give 'em some of their own pudding, Jack, old boy. Get down that Winchester up there and get to work. Make every shot count."

All three then commenced a rapid fire with the repeating rifles.

At every shot a red-skin tumbled from his horse. In five minutes half of the band lay on the ground. The others then started off in a body, filling the air with mournful howls.

"Now, keep it up, Jack," said Frank,

"and Pomp will help you. I'll keep you in range."

He seized the knob that controlled the electric battery, and the next moment the tricycle dashed away in hot pursuit of the flying wretches.

At first they did not know they were pursued, but the continued cracks of the fatal Winchesters and the death-yells that followed them soon told them that a terrible Nemesis was on their trail.

With yells of terror the savages urged their ponies to the top of their speed. They fly over the plains on the wings of the wind, but the tricycle sails along behind them close enough for the terrible Winchesters to do their work.

Then they scattered and went in different directions. Frank concluded to follow a small party of five and run them down.

Away went the red-skins, the white foam flying from the sides of their ponies as they pantingly exerted themselves to get away from the tricycle.

Crack! crack!

Only three of the five now remained.

Those three separated and went in different directions.

Crack! crack!

The one left was a stalwart savage, who had been particularly brutal in his eagerness to harm the inmates of the tricycle.

"Don't shoot him!" cried Frank. "I want to have some fun with him."

"Dat Injun is mos' skeered ter def, Marse Frank," said Pomp, as he proceeded to recharge the magazine of his Winchester.

On finding himself the sole object of pursuit, the solitary savage redoubled his efforts to get away. But his pony was fast falling, and in another mile he went down to rise no more.

The savage sprang to his feet and ran like a deer.

"Hi, dar," yelled Pomp. "Jump high, you yaller nigger! Jump high, I tole yer! Whoop!"

Frank and Jack laughed till tears blinded them. Even Ella Hammond laughed at the terror-stricken wretch as he made frantic efforts to get away.

Suddenly he came to a full stop, folded his arms across his breast and gazed at the tricycle as though he expected it to rush on him and crush him.

"He gives up," said Jack.

"Because he can't run any farther," returned the young inventor.

"Helle, red-skin!" Jack called out to him when the tricycle stopped within a few feet of him. "What did you stop for?"

"Ugh! Injun can't run any more," he replied.

"You are ready to die then, are you?"

"Yes—Injun die. Pale-face too much for red-man."

"That's so. If the red men were not fools," said Frank, "they would let the white men alone. But they are all fools, and the time will come when there will be none left. Go out and tie him to the wire, Pomp."

Pomp went out, and found the panting wretch too much winded to make any resistance to anything that was done to him.

"Heah, you red nigger," said Pomp, leading him to the rear of the tricycle, and attaching the two wires together, after passing them once around his body.

The savage was under the impression that they merely intended to bind him so as to lead him away as a prisoner.

But he was made a wiser man in a few minutes.

An electric shock caused him to leap several feet in the air, and the look of profound amazement was enough to make a stoic laugh.

Another shock and another leap, and the dumbfounded savage began to experience a mortal terror.

Then a succession of shocks sent him rolling on the grass and a series of yells flying through the air.

Suddenly Frank let up on him.

"Ugh! Injun go away—never look at pale-face again. Ugh! Whoop—ugh!" and as other shocks came he yelled like a son of noise.

Then, after giving him a few more by way of

good measure, Frank released him and let him go.

The tricycle then retraced its course, and the three men picked up the rifles that had been dropped when their owners ceased to carry arms in this world.

They gathered up a score or more of rifles, and then the journey toward White River was resumed.

By noon they came in sight of a wagon-train also going to the White River country. There were a dozen wagons and as many families in them. They were making for a piece of timber some six or eight miles ahead of them, where there was both water and fuel.

Several miles to the left was a band of Indians covertly watching the wagons.

"Do you see that band of Indians in the distance, on the left there?" Frank asked of the young girl, pointing in the direction indicated.

"Yes, I see them," she replied.

"Well, they are keeping back till darkness covers them. Then they will creep up and attack the train, stampede the horses, and have everything their own way."

"Oh, mercy! Must it be so, Mr. Reade?" she asked, tears in her eyes. "There are women and children in that train."

"No; for we will save them, if you will consent to it."

"Consent to it! Of course I will. Oh, if every savage could be swept from the face of the earth!"

"Then we will protect this train by running down that band of red-skins. We can make them sick of meddling with everything that comes along this way."

The course of the tricycle was turned in the direction of the Indians, and in a little while it was within rifle-shot of the party. There were about sixty Indians in the band, and the moment they saw the tricycle coming towards them they at once prepared a hot reception for it.

Frank stopped when within a hundred yards. With a whoop the whole band dashed forward and surrounded the tricycle.

"Hello, red-skins!" called out Frank; "what's the matter with you?"

"Ugh! Who you?" demanded a chief, a hideously-scarred cut-throat fellow.

"Oh, we are white people," was the reply.

"Get out of wagon," demanded the chief.

"No, we will stay in here,"

"Ugh! Me shoot if don't open wagon," and the rascal held his rifle menacingly towards the young inventor.

"Now, look here, chief, we want no trouble with you. Go your way and we will go ours. But if you fire a shot or make any attempt to interfere with us we will kill half your band."

"Ugh! Heap big talk!" sneered the chief.

"Open wagon or we will turn it over."

"You can't turn it over."

The chief gave orders to turn it over, and instantly a dozen warriors sprang forward to upset the tricycle. Quick as a flash Frank sent the electric current around the circuit with its full force. The result was the dozen red rascals were knocked into the regions of the happy hunting grounds so quickly that they never knew how it happened.

The chief saw them fall down dead and stood like one in a dream, so utterly dumbfounded was he.

"Take hold and try your hand at it, chief," suggested Frank.

"Ugh!" granted the chief; "pale-face death on Injuns," and recoiled several paces in unfledged dismay.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RENEGADE'S DOOM.

THE expression caused the young inventor to stare at the chief. His face assumed a frown, and his eyes flashed with the fire of indignation.

"What's the matter, Frank?" young Jack asked.

"Did you hear what that fellow said, Jack?"

"Yes; he said 'pale-face death on Injuns.'"

Why?"

"Because I am sure no Indian would ever have used that expression."

"Why, what do you mean, Frank?"

"I mean that I don't believe that chief is an Indian," was the reply.

"Good heavens! What is he, then?"

"A white man in disguise."

"Impossible!" gasped Jack.

"When rascality is involved there is no such limit as impossibility, Jack. The worst Indians on the plains are white men who have fled from justice and sought refuge with them."

"Ah, I have read of such things," said Ella, who had been a silent listener.

"So have I," remarked Jack, "but I had forgotten it. Do you really think he is a white man Frank?"

"I am quite sure of it," replied Frank. "I have seen such men before and never have any mercy on them."

During this half-whispered conversation the chief and his braves also held a short conversation.

"I tell you," whispered the chief, "I know that young fellow, and he'll get away with the whole band. He has the power to kill us all. Look at those dead warriors lying there. What can we do against such a power as that?"

"Revenge—take scalps!" said one of the red-skins.

"But how can we? They are in there and we can't get at 'em."

"Shoot 'em," said the Indians.

"Well, shoot, but I know him well enough to know that he wouldn't come here if he could be shot."

With demoniacal yells the savages leveled their rifles at the cage and fired. Of course the bullets fell to the ground doing no harm to any one.

"There!" exclaimed the chief, turning to his braves. "What did I tell you? We'd better let him alone."

"Ugh! pale-face no kill," grunted a savage.

"Me go away."

He turned and rode away, and the others followed, the chief among them.

"Hold on there, chief," cried Frank, sternly.

"I want to see you."

"Me go away," said the chief, imitating the Indian well.

"If you attempt to leave I'll put a bullet through you. Now come here."

"What want pale-face?"

"I want you, you cowardly renegade," exclaimed Frank.

The chief started as if stung.

"Great God!" he muttered to himself, "has he recognized me! I—I won't own up till the last."

"The pale-face all talk," he said. "I am a chief, and—"

"You are a sneaking renegade who is afraid to show his skin to his own race!" cried Frank.

"If you don't come here I'll put a bullet through your worthless carcass in less than one minute."

Just then the renegade's horse passed between him and the tricycle. He sprang upon him, with one arm over the horse's neck and a foot on the crupper, thus making a shield of the animal.

"Ah! I know that game!" exclaimed Frank. "It was played on me once, but never a second time."

Just as the horse started to run with him, the young inventor sent a bullet through his head, and he went down in a heap.

The renegade sprang up and leaped behind another.

Crack! went one of the Winchesters, and down went another horse, sending the rider rolling in the grass.

The warriors fired a volley and then sprang away at full speed, leaving their captives to get away as best he could.

Seeing there was no chance of escape, the renegade concluded to take the chances.

"I surrender," he called out.

"Come here, then."

He went forward.

"Now, who are you?"

"My name's Ben Short."

"It is, eh? What a queer name for an Indian!"

"I am not an Indian."

"I know you are not. You are a cowardly renegade. I knew it as soon as you said I was 'death on Injuns,' for a genuine Indian would not have said such a thing. Now I am going to carry you away to the White River settlement, and turn you over to—"

"My God!" he gasped, "not there. Not there. Anywhere but there!"

"Why not there?"

"Because—I—have enemies there."

"Well, you have no friends anywhere among the whites. If you go anywhere else my story will hang you, for you know there is no mercy for renegades who go dressed and painted as Indians."

The renegade fell on his knees, and implored the young inventor to spare him.

"Spare me now, and I will leave the West forever. I will go to Australia, and never set foot in America again."

"No, you are a murderous rascal, and you have committed some horrible crime down in the White River settlement, which is why you don't want to go there. Go out there and tie him, Pomp."

Pomp opened the door of the cage and stepped outside. The trembling wretch, in the hope that he would be shot down where he was, which he preferred to being carried away to the White River settlement, drew a tomahawk and rushed furiously at the faithful black.

"Hole on dar!" cried Pomp, springing back out of the way of the deadly weapon. "Hole on dar, I tole you!"

With a war-whoop that echoed far and wide over the prairie, the renegade rushed forward, the tomahawk raised in the air.

Pomp drew his revolver and fired.

The renegade threw up his hands, clutched wildly at space, trembled violently for a moment, and then fell to the earth a corpse.

"By George, that saves us a great deal of trouble," exclaimed Frank. "I could not shoot him down in cold blood. Bully for you, Pomp."

"Dat was a bad un, Marse Frank," said Pomp, looking down at the wretch as he stood over him with the smoking revolver in his hand.

"Yes, he was a hard case, I guess. Come, pick up those rifles on the ground there and bring them in. We could get enough arms for a regiment of men."

Pomp gathered up the rifles, a dozen of them, and placed them in the cage. Then he entered, and Frank turned the tricycle toward the wagon-train in the distance.

CHAPTER XII.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

As they speeded along toward the wagon-train, Miss Hammond asked:

"Mr. Reade, why does not the government employ you to kill all the Indians?"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Frank. "The government couldn't pay me money enough."

"Why not?"

"Because I could never be hired to kill a man. I never harm a man until he first makes an attempt to harm me or my friends."

"You have noticed that, and also that the Indians try to do harm to whites wherever they can."

"You are mistaken, young lady. When I find the whites too much for them, I am peaceable enough. They are cut-throats, thieves, and stop at nothing they can get away with for their own safety to themselves. I sometimes think the government ought to assign them to the wall and build a wall like the Berlin wall, all round it. They can't do any more mischief than they can do now, and they are hungry. They have caused the whites, God knows, but they don't suffer the more for giving them their feelings in acts of violence."

"That's among them cause, more than any else. Ah! we will soon see the train now."

"Oh, I am so glad! I shall see some of my own sex among them. Maybe they are going to the White River settlement, too."

"Yes, I think they are. They are heading in that direction at any rate."

"Oh, I hope so."

The tricycle soon came up with the train. The old guide in charge of the wagons came forward, his whole air and manner betraying the most intense curiosity.

"What in 'tarnal creation is that, strangers?" he asked, as he gazed at the tricycle.

"Hello, McDonald!" cried Frank, throwing open the door of the cage and grasping the old guide's hand.

"Thunder and greased lightning!" exclaimed the old man. "Why, Reade! Blast yer picter! What's all this hyer thing?"

"Oh, it's a new thing I got up, Mac," replied Frank, "and we are having a high old time running around over the plains."

"Hello, Pomp, yer black nigger!" exclaimed the old guide, as Pomp emerged from the cage. "Give us yer paw!"

"How is yer, Marse Mac?" Pomp asked, as he shook hands with the old guide.

"Never better in my life, old man," was the reply. "But tell me what this thing is; I don't understand it—hanged if I do!"

"Well," said Frank, as he saw nearly all of the men of the train running up, "it's a tricycle, a three-wheeled concern, made to run by electricity."

"Run by what?"

"Electricity."

The old man gradually caught on, and then there was the greatest wonder to see and understand how it worked.

"Hang me if yer don't beat the old one himself, Reade," said the old guide. "Whoever heard of such a thing as that?"

"I expect to beat it yet, old man," said the young inventor, laughing. "Here's a young lady, whom we found in the timber this morning trying to get away from the red-skins. She was captured from a train on the way to White River settlement."

"That's whar we are bound," said the guide.

"Oh, I am so glad!" cried Ella.

"When did they catch yer?" the guide asked.

"Night before last."

"Well, your train is only two days ahead of me. We are following their trail now."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Frank.

"Yes."

"Then we can place her with her people by sunset."

"Oh, if you only would," she said, "my gratitude would be boundless."

"The pleasure of seeing you restored to your friends will be joy enough for me, Miss Hammond. We will start in a half hour. Mac, there was a band of Indians watching your train back there. We killed a dozen of them, and scattered the rest of them. Keep an eye on them."

"I've been watching them all day, my boy. They won't bother us now, I reckon."

"I can spare you a dozen extra rifles if you need them."

"I may need them. Let me have them."

Pomp brought out a dozen rifles and gave them to the men, who took and examined them with the greatest curiosity.

Ella Hammond spent a short half hour with the women of the train, and then re-entered the tricycle cage to try to overtake her father's train, which was two days ahead.

The emigrants cheered them as the tricycle moved away, and were amazed at the immense speed it developed.

How the tricycle flew over the level plain! The trail of the train was as plain as a dozen wagons and forty horses could make.

"Oh, we'll soon overtake them!" cried Ella, her face all aglow with the bright anticipation of meeting her father and friends.

"Yes, we are making a day's journey every hour at this rate," said Jack.

"There's a strip of timber ahead of us," said Ella, "and that means a stream; how can we cross it?"

"If the wagons have crossed it we can follow

them. Don't be uneasy about that. Wherever a wagon can go we can follow."

They reached the timber and found that the wagon-train had camped there the night before.

"They crossed down below here, somewhere," said Frank, gazing at the trail. "We'll follow and see where the ford is."

Following the trail about five miles along the edge of the timber, they at last struck a road that had been cut through the woods to the river. Turning into it they reached the stream in a few minutes, to find that the trail of the wagons disappeared in the water and reappeared on the opposite bank directly in front of them.

"Get out and wade across, Pomp," said Frank, "and see whether the bottom is solid enough for us."

"Yes, sah," and shouldering his Winchester, Pomp boldly waded out into the stream and made his way over to the other bank. The water only reached a little above the knees, for the stream was wide and shallow at that point.

Just as Pomp reached the other bank two men darted out of the thicket and seized him.

CHAPTER XIII.

POMP AND THE OUTLAWS—THE RESCUE OF A WAGON-TRAIN.

THE moment Pomp felt himself seized by the strangers he knew that any resistance on his part would be worse than useless. He looked the surprise he felt, however, and hurriedly asked:

"What youse gwine ter do?"

"We are going to make a white man of you," replied one of the men, laughing, "and elect you President of the United States."

"Youse can't fool dis nigger dat way, marsa," said Pomp. "A nigger won't make a white man, nohow."

"Nor can a white man make a nigger, eh?"

"No, sah, kase he ain't got de wool."

"By the great rattler, but the nigger is right," said one of the men, laughing. "But see hyer, nig, what kind of a rig is that on the other side of there?"

"Dat's a tricycle, sah."

"A what?"

"A tricycle, sah?"

"What in glory is that?"

"I dunno, sah. Dat's what dey call it. It run on free wheels, an'—"

"Blow me for prairie smoke, Bill!" exclaimed the larger of the two men, "if the darned wheel-barrow ain't coming over!"

"Yes, sah," said Pomp. "Dey is gwine ter come ober heah."

"How many men are in it, eh?"

"Two, sah."

"Are they armed?"

"Yes, say."

The two men passed quick glances and then started to go into the thicket, as if to ambush the tricycle.

"Hands off that nigger!" cried Frank from the tricycle, which was now in the middle of the stream.

Pomp pulled back in order to keep the two men in sight.

"Come on!" hissed the taller of the two men, drawing a revolver, and aiming it at Pomp's head.

That act was his last.

Frank had covered him with his rifle, and the next moment the keen crack of the weapon sent a bullet crashing through his brain.

The man dropped dead at Pomp's feet.

"De Lor' sabe us!" exclaimed Pomp, his eyes staring like one half crazed.

"Wiped out," gasped the other outlaw, slinking away into the thicket, and leaving Pomp unmolested.

A few minutes later the tricycle reached the bank of the river.

"Who were they, Pomp?" the young inventor asked.

"Dunno, Marse Frank, but dey is bad 'uns."

"Oh that fellow lying there is a good one, now. He'll never do anything wrong again, I'm sure."

Pomp glanced down at the dead man, and remarked:

"Yes, sah, dat's er fac'; but it's mighty onhealthy goodness."

Jack and Frank laughed!

"Human life has a very low value in this part of the world," said Jack.

"Yes, there are thousands of white men who live by murder and robbery in this section. I would not have thought of shooting that fellow had he not placed his pistol against Pomp's head."

"Oh, you were justified in killing him. I wonder where the other fellow is?"

"Oh, he is in the woods somewhere. He won't show himself to us, you may depend on it. I know these fellows too well. They are cruel and blood-thirsty, but seldom brave."

"What could have been their object in stopping Pomp?"

"Robbery or murder," replied Frank. "What did they say to you, Pomp?"

"Dey wanted ter know what dis heah tricycle was, sah."

"They did, eh?"

"Yes, sah."

"What did you tell them?"

"I tole um it was a tricycle."

"Did they know what tha' meant?"

"No, sah, dey didn't."

"I thought so."

They looked around for some time in hopes of seeing something of the other outlaw, but were not successful.

"We may as well move on," said Frank.

"That fellow will never show up to us."

They moved on, keeping on the trail of the wagon-train.

"I am glad we are out of sight of that dead man," said Ella. "It makes me shudder to see a dead person."

"Which shows what a good, kind heart you have, Miss Hammond," said Frank. "I am used to such things, and have no sympathy whatever for such as they."

"I'm sure they don't deserve any," she said; "but that does not make the presence of death any the less repulsive."

"No indeed."

By this time they were again far out on the prairie, following the wagon trail. The tree-tops of the timber behind them began to sink low down in the horizon, when the white tops of a number of wagons were seen away in the distance straight ahead of them.

"There they are! That's the train!" exclaimed Jack.

"Yes," said Frank, "that's the train. We will soon catch up with them."

The speed of the tricycle was increased to its utmost. It flew along over the prairie like a thing of life. The train of wagons became more distinct to the eye every moment.

"Look dar!" cried Pomp. "Dar's Injuns runnin' round dem wagons!"

A scream from Ella followed.

"Oh, the Indians are attacking the train," she cried. "They will all be killed."

"No," said Frank, with a stern glitter in his eye. "But we'll see if we can't kill all those red-skins. Get the rifles ready, Pomp."

Pomp lost no time in preparing the terrible Winchesters. They were already loaded with sixteen charges each.

The young inventor sent the tricycle dashing forward toward the Indians. The savages thought it was another prize that had come to fall into their hands. They set up a yell and rode to meet it.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Crack! Crack! Crack!

How the Winchesters sung!

Each crack was the death-knell of a red-skin. The reds returned the fire, but several minutes elapsed before they became aware of the fact that their shots did no damage. Then, as the tricycle had come to a halt, they dismounted, drew their tomahawks and made a furious assault on it. This was just what the merciless young inventor wanted. He turned the death-dealing electric current loose on them in full force, and every red-skin who had a hand or foot on any part of the tricycle, dropped dead in their tracks.

The few who saw them sink down in the arms of death were amazed beyond measure.

But Frank and Jack did not wait to allow them to recover from their surprise. They continued to fire—Pomp doing likewise, dropping a red at every shot. At last they discovered that they had caught a Tartar, and attempted to get away.

With yells that sounded far and wide over the plains, the villains urged their ponies to the top of their speed and made for a piece of timber several miles ahead of them.

"Now, make every shot count," cried Frank, sending the tricycle flying after them.

Jack and Pomp plied their rifles with telling effect, and the savages were seized with a panic. They saw that their doom was sealed unless they could gain the timber.

To their horror the tricycle passed round between them and the timber.

"Don't let one escape!" cried Frank. "Can you handle a rifle, Miss Hammond?"

"Yes, sir; I used to shoot squirrels at home," she replied.

"Then take up my rifle there and fire at that rascal out on the left. Take him right under the left shoulder-blade, and you'll see him go down like a log."

The young girl, pale and trembling in every limb, took up the rifle, ran the muzzle through the small aperture of the wire cage, took quick aim and fired.

The red-skin threw up both hands, uttered a death-yell, and fell heavily to the ground.

"A splendid shot, as I live!" cried Frank.

"Try another one! There! Another one down! Miss Hammond, you are a true heroine! What! A third one! Good! Kill half a dozen, and I'll agree to find you a husband in a year."

The young girl did not appear to hear what was said. Her eyes flashed with a glitter of hate toward the red savages. Her hands were as steady as any old hunter's, as she aimed and fired seven times in rapid succession, bringing down a victim at every shot.

"Seven dead Indians!" exclaimed Frank, releasing his hold of the electric knob, and clasping the young girl in his arms. "You are a jewel of a girl!" and he kissed her, in spite of her struggles to get away from him.

Crack! Crack! Crack! went Pomp's and Jack's rifles, and the death-yells that followed each shot told how well they had aimed.

"That's the last one!" cried Jack, giving another shot. "The whole band is wiped out!"

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp, looking around to see if any more live reds were in sight.

"Dey's all dead, sah."

"Then we'll join the wagon-train," said Frank, "and let Miss Hammond assure her friends of her safety."

"And tell them of the two brave heroes who saved her," she added.

"And how you slew seven red-skins like an old hunter," put in Frank, as he turned the tricycle in the direction of the wagons.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE YOUNG INVENTOR MEETS AN OLD FRIEND OF HIS FATHER.

THE people of the wagon-train had been witnesses of the destruction of the band of Indians by the tricycle. They could form no correct idea as to what the strange vehicle was. But they knew it was their friend, and that was enough for them to know.

The leader, or guide, was an old plainsman, who had been an Indian-fighter for twenty years. His name was Joe Bedford. He was a hard fighter, and would have given the reds a desperate fight. But the odds against him were so great that he knew he would have been wiped out as soon as night gave the enemy the advantage.

"Boys," he cried out to the men of the wagon-train, "I don't know what it is, but we'll give three cheers as it comes up, let it be devil or saint."

The cheers were given with a will as the tricycle dashed up into their midst.

The door of the cage was opened and Ella Hammond sprang out.

"Father, father!" she cried, "where is father?"

"Good Lord!" cried the guide. "That's the gal! That's Hammond's gal!"

"Ella! Ella!" cried a dozen women, rushing forward with outstretched arms to embrace her.

They hugged and kissed and wept tears of joy, for every one in the train knew and loved the pretty girl.

Old Joe Bedford came up and looked at the girl.

"Ella," he asked, "you're all right, eh?"

"Yes, sir; thanks to Mr. Reade and Mr. Middleton."

"Reade! Frank Reade! The inventive son of the old steam-man galoot! Great catamounts! Which is he?"

Ella turned and pointed to Frank.

"That's Mr. Reade, sir," she said, and the old guide advanced and grabbed him.

"My boy," he said, "I know your father—he knows me. I heard you had gotten up a steam Tally-Ho, which just got away with everything. How's the old man? I'm confounded glad to see you."

Just at that moment Pomp came out of the cage, and the old guide glared at him.

"Hello, Pomp, you woolly-headed son of charcoal!" he exclaimed, grasping the faithful darkey's hand, and wringing it with a force that made Pomp wince.

"Marse Bedford," said Pomp, "I'se glad ter see yer. Dem Injuns was bad arter yer."

"Yes, but they didn't get a single scalp, old man."

"No, sah. Dey doan't git no skulps when Marse Frank is dar."

"Hanged if he hasn't wiped out the whole band. I say, young man, what is this thing, anyhow."

"It's a tricycle run by electricity," said Frank, quite amused by the old guide's enthusiasm.

"What in the name of blue lightning is that?"

"It's a three-wheeled wagon—a tricycle—and is run by electric force, instead of steam, that's all."

"That's all! Why young man, that's the biggest 'all' I ever heard of in all my life, and I'm over half a hundred years old."

"This is a fast age, you know, sir, and the world moves very fast," remarked Frank.

"So it does—so it does," and the old guide rubbed his eyes and looked around at the tricycle. "How fast can it run?"

"Faster than any horse on the plains—over thirty miles an hour."

"Good Lord! How he world moves! Young man, when you get up a flying-machine fly over here and see me. I'll tell you of a fortune waiting for somebody who can fly."

"All right," said Frank, laughing, "I haven't thought of flying yet, though I don't know what I may do in the future. But hadn't you better be moving on toward that timber there? You don't want to stop out here so far away from water, you know?"

"Yes—you're right, young man; but you'll go with us, won't you?"

"Yes, we'll stop with you to-night."

"Oh, Mr. Reade!" cried Ella Hammond, running up to the young inventor with tears in her eyes. "My father and three others are out hunting for me and have not been heard from since they started!"

"Is that so? I am sorry to hear that. If it will do you any good I will promise to do all I can to find him to-morrow."

"Ah! I knew you would say that! You are so good and kind!"

"I am sure it's my duty to help any one in distress."

"Of course, but—but—"

"Well, never mind, Miss Hammond. We'll go in search of your father to-morrow. You may rest assured that we will do all in our power to find him."

She went back to the women of the train, and Frank, turning to Jack, said:

"Let's go out and gather the rifles of those dead red-skins."

"Yes—that's a good idea. Come on."

"Mr. Bedford, we are going out to get the rifles of that band, and will overtake you in a half hour."

"All right," said the old guide, turning to his post and starting the train toward the timber ahead of them.

Frank and Jack then ran back to the spot where at least half the band had been destroyed by the terrible electric shock. There they found about thirty rifles and a good lot of ammunition. These they gathered up, and then proceeded along the line of the flight and picked up the arms of those who had fallen.

"Now we'll join the train," said Frank, "and stop over night with them. To-morrow we'll go in search of Mr. Hammond."

When they overtook the wagons they were within a mile of the timber. They concluded to dash ahead and select a good spot on which to camp. They skirted the timber about a half mile, and succeeded in finding an excellent place for a camp. Signaling to the guide where to come, the tricycle stopped and waited for them to come up.

The place they had selected had evidently been used as a camping-ground on several occasions. There was a cold spring there just in the edge of the timber, one of the greatest requisites to comfort under such circumstances.

When the wagons came up, old Joe Bedford recognized the spot and shook his head.

"I don't like this place, Reade," he said. "I was here once ten years ago, and we were attacked by road-agents and Indians. Other trains have been attacked here since then."

"That's no sign that we will be attacked," said the young inventor. "The band that would have troubled you is no more, and no others are around."

"You are right, but I will put out a strong guard, anyhow."

"Of course. You should always do that. I never take any chances while out on the plains. There's too much devilry going on."

"You are right, young man. That's just what your father used to say. I reckon we won't be bothered any to-night."

"No—if we are, woe be unto those who do it."

The wagons were arranged in a semicircle, about two hundred yards from the timber, and the tricycle occupied a position near enough to the spring to command it in case of trouble.

The fire was built in the center of the circle of wagons, and the women at once began the preparations for supper. Jack and Frank gave them one of the bear hams to cut up into steaks. Soon the savory smell of broiling steaks pervaded the place for a quarter of a mile around.

That night Frank created a sensation at the camp-fire by telling how Ella Hammond had killed seven Indians that day with a Winchester rifle. Everybody was astonished. No one had dreamed that the modest young girl could be capable of harming even a rabbit. The old guide seized her hand and swore he'd make her Mrs. Bedford if she'd say the word.

Ella blushed to the tips of her ears, and said:

"Mr. Reade made me do it."

"Thunder!" exclaimed Frank, "I merely asked her if she could shoot. She said she could, and then I handed her a rifle. The way she thinned out that tribe would have made old Kit Carson's heart leap for joy. Oh, she's a jewel, fellows."

The young men eyed her with looks of admiration, and the women regarded her with amazement.

The evening passed quickly, for the emigrants were so deeply interested in the story of the adventures of the tricycle that they never noticed the flight of time.

It was midnight when Jack took out his watch, and said it was time to go to bed.

The young inventor, and Jack, and Pomp, retired to the tricycle to sleep. They never slept outside of it, as in that case one would have to stand guard. Inside the cage they could sleep with a thousand deadly foes around them.

In ten minutes after reaching the tricycle the

three men were soundly sleeping, and a profound silence reigned in the camp.

CHAPTER XV.

A SINGULAR CAPTURE—A LOTTERY OF DEATH.

THE profound silence that reigned in the camp was not destined to last through the night. About two hours before daylight a dozen dark forms congregated at the spring just inside the timber, and carried on a whispered conversation.

"Yes," said one in good English, "it's old Joe Bedford's train. I saw him two days, or rather two nights, ago, and he has about a dozen good men with him who knows how to handle a rifle."

"But they are all asleep now," said another, "except two men on guard around the wagons. We can rush up and wipe out the guards, and then settle the others as they crawl out of the wagons. Then we can plunder the wagons and take away the young women all in a few minutes."

They were white men known in that section as road-agents, the worst band of cut-throats that ever infested any part of the American continent. They had surprised and plundered wagon-trains on that very spot several times before, and were confident of another prize now.

Just as they were about to make the rush for the purpose of killing the two guards, one of them stepped on a twig, which snapped loud enough to attract the attention of Jack Middleton, in the tricycle. He raised himself on his elbow and glared around, thinking some animal was creeping up to the spring for a drink of water.

He caught sight of the dark forms moving toward the tricycle on their way to the wagons.

"Hello!" he said. "What's this? Frank! Pomp! Get up, quick!"

Frank and Pomp sprang up instantly, and glared around them. Frank gave a shrill whistle that caused every man in the wagons to spring out, revolvers in hand.

"Perdition!" hissed the leader of the band. "That blocks our game! Kill the fools and then break for the timber!"

They turned and scrambled up on the tricycle, firing their revolvers in the hope of hitting those inside.

"Turn it over, men!" ordered the leader. "Here, take hold here!"

They laid hold of the tricycle, and in another moment would have had it lying on its side had not Frank given them an electric shock that doubled them up in convulsions. They groaned and howled like all possessed, and tried in vain to release their grasp on the tricycle. The electric current caused such a contraction of the muscles of their hands that they could not let go.

They plunged, screamed, howled and swore like so many pirates, but the relentless shocks doubled and twisted them into all kinds of tortuous shapes.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed old Joe Bedford and half a score of his men, running up with weapons ready for action.

"I've got a lot of rascals here," said Frank, "held by electric shocks. Disarm them and then you can take the whole gang."

"Great buffaloes!" exclaimed the old guide, as he stared at the villainous-looking wretches. "How am I to do that? Your darned electricity will knock me double, and I don't want to fool with any lightning."

"There's no danger if you only touch them with one hand," said Frank.

"One hand, then—one hand, boys!" said the old guide. "Disarm them."

He took the weapons away from the man nearest to him without feeling any shock of any kind. Then the others joined in and disarmed the whole band.

"Got all their arms?" the young inventor asked.

"Yes; got everything," was the reply.

"Stand by to blow their brains out, then, if they resist or attempt to run."

"All right—let 'em drop."

Frank cut off the current of electricity, and the dozen wretches fell down as limp as drunken men, completely used up by the tremendous shocks they had received.

"Better tie them now before they get over it," suggested Jack, and the suggestion was very promptly acted on by the old guide. Strong cords were procured, and in a few minutes each wretch had his hands bound behind his back, and that in no very gentle manner either.

Then they began to recover their speech. They glared at the tricycle in dumbfounded amazement. Then they turned and looked at the two young men who came out of it.

"Ten thousand fiends!" hissed the leader. "What is it, and what does this mean, anyhow?"

"It means that you are fairly caught, you sneaking rascal," exclaimed Frank.

"What right have you to catch me, I'd like to know?" demanded the wretch, with a coolness that staggered the young inventor for a moment.

"The right of self-defense," he finally replied. "I fully understood your game, and blocked it very nicely. You see I thought some of you good sort of fellows would be along here, so I moved over by the spring in order to get the first show at you. It was a pretty good trick, eh, wasn't it?"

"We've done you no harm," said the leader.

"That was not your fault. You did all you could. You fired a half dozen shots at me. I only gave you a little electricity, and held you till my friends came up."

CHAPTER XVI.

A TERRIBLE RETRIBUTION.

OLD Joe Bedford had lights brought and held close enough to enable him to scan the faces of the prisoners. One of them tried to turn his head so as not to let the light reveal his features.

"Hold your mug round here," sternly ordered the old guide. "Ah! I know you. Dick Clarke. You are a robber and a murderer, as well as a horse-thief, and I guess the whole crowd is of the same stripe."

"No, no, not so!" exclaimed the leader.

"See here!" demanded Frank, "why did your whole band shoot at me and try to turn us over?"

"You shot at me first!" was the bold reply.

"Well, as a liar you can take the cake! Not a soul has fired a shot to-night but your gang. You hissed out your order to 'kill the fools' and blazed away at me, all because I gave the alarm that spoiled your job. Now, if you don't hang at sunrise, I'll never befriend another wagon-train."

"You can bet all your electricity that they'll hang, young man," said old Joe Bedford, "and before sunrise, too, if we can find rope enough in camp to swing 'em up with."

"You don't dare do it!" gasped the leader, turning deathly pale.

"We don't, eh? Why not?"

"Because—you have—no—right—to do it. We are entitled to a trial, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the old guide; "your respect for law comes too late. You have lived outside the law, and now you will have to die outside of it. Boys, get all the spare rope you can find in the camp."

Four men went back to the wagons in search of ropes, and found all the women up and greatly excited. They wanted to know what the trouble was, and were told that a little picnic was about to be organized out in the woods, to which no ladies were to be invited. They then knew that some terrible work of some kind was going on, but they did not ask any more questions, as they really didn't wish to know what it was.

"Just keep quiet, ladies," said one of the men, "and we'll soon be back. You are protected as much as if an army of ten thousand men was around you."

When the ropes were brought the wretches weakened.

Said one:

"Look here now, I'll give everything away if you will give me my life."

"What can you give away?" Frank asked.

"The whole band, their names, head-quarters, and where all their money is."

"There's a regular band of you, then?"

"Yes, and a strong one, too," was the reply.

"I can tell you more than he can," said another. "I've been in the band longer than he has."

"Well, you are a precious pair of scoundrels," said Frank. "I'll let you draw straws as to which shall be spared," and he prepared two straws of unequal length and held out his hand for them to draw.

"The longest wins—the shortest dies," he said.

"Then there's no need of but one drawing," said the first. "Put in three straws, and let us both draw."

"All right," said Frank, taking another and placing it alongside those already in his hand. "Release their hands, Bedford."

They were unbound, and then they stepped forward to draw for their lives, one of which depended on the length of a little piece of straw.

The two men held their breaths as they stood up and reached forth their hands. The young inventor held out his right hand, and the first man looked hard at it for a few moments, as if to calculate on the length of the three little straws it held in its grasp.

"Draw!" exclaimed Frank, himself impressed with the awful consequence that must come to one of the men.

The man drew one of the straws and held his breath as he glared at it. The second man then drew and held his up. Both were short, very short, and it was necessary to place them side by side in order to ascertain which of the two was the longest. There was but a quarter of an inch difference in lengths.

"The second draw loses," said Bedford, in a solemn tone.

A howl of terror escaped the doomed man, and he darted forward, intending to escape into the bushes beyond the spring. Old Joe Bedford raised his revolver and fired at him, and the man fell with a bullet in his back.

"There's no getting away, you see," remarked the old guide. "You fellows have made a mistake, and didn't know it till it was too late."

"Pomp," said Frank, "tie that fellow's hands again, so he can't get loose, and then back him up against that tree, and tie him to it."

"Yes, sah," and the faithful black obeyed orders to the very letter. He took the man who had won his life by drawing a straw, and tied him hard and fast to a tree near by.

"Now go on with the hanging," said Frank, turning to the old guide.

The old plainsman had no sympathy for the white marauders of the plains. He promptly went to work, adjusting nooses around the necks of the prisoners, all of whom fell on their knees, and begged piteously for their lives.

"Stand up and die like men," he said.

"You've killed many a man, and must have expected your time would come some day. Stand up and face the music like brave men. Here, boys, throw the ends of these two ropes over that limb up there. That's it. Now you may draw them up."

"Mercy! mercy!" yelled the two doomed men, rolling over and over on the grass in mortal terror. "Oh, Lord, have mercy! Spare me! Spare me and I'll be—"

"No quarter for such wretches," said the old guide. "Judge Lynch never makes many mistakes. Up with 'em, boys."

The men who held to the ropes pulled them up, and in a moment they were dangling in the air.

It was a horrible death by strangulation, as there was no drop by which their necks could be broken.

The leader of the outlaws shuddered as he glared up at the terrible struggle of the two victims.

"Bedford," he said, turning to the implacable old guide, "the worst man that ever lived is entitled to some consideration during the last moments of his life. I only ask one favor. I don't ask for my life. I know it would be use-

less. But I do ask that you shoot us instead of hanging us. It can make no difference to you so long as we are wiped out."

"Oh, it makes the greatest difference in the world," replied the old guide. "To shoot you would look like murder. To hang you would be the punishment of the law for crime. Do you understand?"

"Yes, but the end is the same, and that's all you want."

"No, not at all. There's immense satisfaction in hanging one who has robbed men, women and children, as you have done. You shall die the same death that a sheriff would give you—by hanging till you are dead."

The leader bit his lips and summoned all his desperate courage to his aid. He was trying to make up his mind to die bravely; but the next moment his fortitude gave way, and again he fell on his knees and begged for his life.

"No use," was the reply, and the work of death again went on.

When they came to the wounded man they found that he had already paid the debt by giving up the ghost.

"That ends that band," said the young inventor. "But you had better bury them, Mr. Bedford, lest some of the ladies of the train see them after sunrise."

"Yes—yes—we'll bury 'em," said the guide, who turned and sent four men back to the wagons for picks and spades.

"You see what a narrow escape you have made," said Frank to the man who had escaped the fate of his comrades.

"Yes," was the shuddering reply.

"When you get free again you will go at the same game again, and finally die as they did."

"No—no."

"I think you will. But we will spare you if you reveal all you said you would."

"I will do that, sir!"

"Very well. What is your name?"

"Tom Todd."

"Is that the name you go by in the band?"

"Yes—they don't know me by any other."

"You have another?"

The man hesitated.

"Is it necessary to tell the name I have disgraced, and thus render my old parents miserable at home?"

"Are your parents living?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In Ohio."

"When did you see them last?"

"Eight years ago."

"How came you here?"

"I came West to seek my fortune in the mines, and for over a year worked steadily. But one night I quarreled with a man over a game of cards, and killed him. To escape being lynched I fled, and, soon after that, joined the road-agents. That's how I came to be with the band."

"And you have lived by plundering ever since?"

"Yes, we were a band of robbers."

"How many are in the band?"

"There are about fifty."

"They have but one headquarters?"

"We have several places where we meet and stop as long as we like, but there's only one place where the booty of the band is kept."

"Where is that place?"

"About one hundred miles north of here."

"Can it be reached by a wagon?"

"Yes, very easily."

"Now tell me, did your party see anything of four white men who were out in search of a young girl in the last three days?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"About fifty miles east of here. A party of Indians had them."

"The deuce!"

"Yes, sir."

"What were the reds going to do with them?"

"Demand a ransom for them, I think."

"Do you think you could guide us to that band of Indians?"

"Yes—we are on good terms with them, and they with us. They are now down on the lower

fork, on a hunt for the daughter of their chief, who has eloped with a Mexican."

"Well, we'll start after sunrise, and see if we can't overtake and rescue those white men. And see here, if you tell us any yarns, we'll make quick work of you. We are in no humor to be trifled with. That we will hang a man for cause you have already seen."

"Yes, I know that my life is in your hands, and will not trifle with it. I am no fool."

"All right. You understand the situation I see."

By this time the dead bodies had been covered up in a trench that had been hastily dug by the picks and spades of the emigrants, and the spot covered with leaves and grass, so as not to attract the attention of any of the women of the train when they visited the spring at sunrise.

"That's all right now," remarked the old guide, glancing around in approval of what had been done. "Now we can return to the train, and tell the women that we have succeeded in driving the enemy away."

"They are all up and dressed now," said one of the emigrants, "and making ready to get breakfast. The sun will be up in less than an hour."

"So it will. There's no use in going to bed again. Gather more wood in your arms, boys, and carry it to the fire."

They did as the old guide ordered, each man returning to the camp-fire with his arms full of wood. The women were assured that all danger was past, and that they might go to the spring with perfect safety.

Frank sought Ella Hammond, and taking her by the hand led her away from the others.

"I wanted to tell you," he said to her in low tones, so as not to be overheard by the others, "that I have heard of your father. He is alive and well, but a prisoner."

"A prisoner!" she gasped.

"Yes—in the hands of the reds, but as they hold him for a ransom, there's no danger of harm being done to him."

"How did you find it out?" she asked.

"We captured a dozen robbers at midnight, and hung them all but one. That one we spared because he promised to tell us where the rendezvous of the band was, and put us in the way of breaking it up altogether. He told me how he came to know about your father's capture, and I guess he has told the truth about it. I am going to start after breakfast, and will never stop till I have restored your father to you."

"How can I ever thank you enough, Mr. Reade? You have been so kind and generous to me!"

"By not telling any of the women and children that we hung eleven men out there by the spring before daylight this morning."

"Oh, I won't say a word."

"That's a good girl. Now give us a kiss, and after breakfast we will be off."

She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Ah! That's worth a year of hard work," he said, snatching another. "Now come back to the fire and look as gay as you can, for your dear father shall be restored to you as sure as I live two days longer."

They returned to the fire and joined in the general conversation, which was one of congratulation over the escape of the night just ended.

The women prepared a savory breakfast, and all ate heartily.

Then the young inventor prepared to leave to go in search of Mr. Hammond and his three friends. The prisoner, who had also eaten a breakfast, was placed in the cage of the tricycle, and the others followed. The next moment they were off.

CHAPTER XVII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER RESTORED.

THE old guide had agreed to encamp by the spring for three days, to wait for the return of the tricycle, as well as to give his stock a

chance to recuperate on the rich grass and good water which the spot afforded.

This was exceedingly pleasant to the women of the train, as it gave them a chance to take plenty of exercise, which they so much needed.

The whole party of emigrants gathered to cheer the young inventor as the tricycle moved away. The clear silvery tones of the tricycle's bell mingled with the united voices as they cheered, and the next moment the electric wonder was dashing over the dew-bespangled grass at the rate of twenty-five miles an hour.

"My God!" cried the prisoner, Tom Todd, "what in wonder's name is this?" and his eyes distended in terrible amazement.

"This is an electric tricycle," said Jack, "run by electricity."

"What did you call it?"

"A tricycle—a three-wheeled vehicle," repeated Jack.

The prisoner was lost in amazement.

"In this cage," continued Jack, "we can defy a thousand foes. No bullet can reach us, and if any number take hold we can send a lightning current through them that will kill every man who gets a taste of it."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Todd. "Who made it?"

Jack pointed toward Frank, who was looking out ahead and guiding the course of the tricycle. Todd gazed upon him as if he considered him a god. A feeling of awe took possession of him.

"Which way now, Todd?" the young inventor asked, suddenly turning to the prisoner after having gone about fifty miles.

"Straight ahead till you pass between two pieces of timber," was the reply.

The tricycle dashed forward, and in another hour the two tracts of timber came in sight, but some distance on the right. Frank guided the tricycle between them. They were but a couple of miles apart, and seemed to be very heavy timber.

A thin column of whitish smoke went up from the south side of the one on the right.

"They may be over there," said Todd, looking at the smoke.

"We'll see," and as the tricycle passed between the two tracts, it turned to the right and made for the column of smoke.

When within a couple of miles of the place a party of Indians were seen hurriedly mounting their ponies. There must have been about thirty warriors in the band.

"That's the band!" exclaimed Todd, gazing at the party of horsemen, who were now coming to meet the tricycle.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes—I know it."

"Then I will go up pretty close to the fire and see if I can see anything of the prisoners."

About a score of warriors came up on their ponies and greeted our heroes with:

"How do?"

"How are you, reds?" cried Frank.

"Where going?" one of the savages asked, riding alongside the tricycle.

"Oh, we are going to stop with you awhile. Got anything to eat in camp?"

"Ugh! yes—heap buffalo meat."

"Good! I am glad of that, for I am very hungry."

Getting up within fifty yards of the camp-fire, the tricycle came to a dead halt, and the entire band crowded around to get a look at it and the four men inside.

"Dar dey is!" exclaimed Pomp, as he caught sight of four white men bound to saplings just in the edge of the timber.

"Yes," said Todd, "they are the four men I saw three days ago."

"Well, keep quiet, till I manage it. I'll have them if I have to destroy the whole band."

"Who pale-face?" the chief of the reds asked.

"I am Frank, the young lightning chief," replied the young inventor.

"Ugh—me great chief!"

Todd had told Frank that the chief's name was Jumping Wolf, and that he was very vain of his reputation as a warrior.

"Yes, Jumping Wolf is a great chief," he said. "Away in the East, where the sun rises, all my people have heard of him, and

they know he is the great warrior of the red men."

"Ugh!" grunted the chief, strutting like a turkey-cock, "the pale-face is wise, and his tongue is straight. Jumping Wolf slays his enemies and hangs their scalps in his wig-wam."

"Is Jumping Wolf on the war-path now?"

"Ugh, no; no war-paint now."

"Then what are you doing with those prisoners over there by the fire?"

Jumping Wolf was astonished at the question, and glanced suspiciously at the young inventor.

"Ugh! bad white mans," he said; "kill Indian squaw. Jumping Wolf send um away. Bad white mans!"

"Oh, they are bad white men, are they? All right. Bad white men ought to be scalped. Hope you won't let them get away from you."

"Ugh! no."

"Hold on to them. I must go now. Good-bye, Jumping Wolf."

"Ugh! Where pale-face go? Jumping Wolf great chief. Pale-face no go yet."

"Why not? You won't stop me, will you?"

"Ugh! no, go!" was the emphatic reply.

But the tricycle moved slowly away.

Jumping Wolf gave the signal, and instantly the whole band dismounted and seized hold of the tricycle wherever they could find a place to get a grip.

This was just what Frank had been playing for. As soon as he saw that they all had a grip, he gave them enough electricity to almost paralyze them. They yelled bloody murder in ten thousand different keys, and twisted and squirmed like so many impaled worms. They couldn't let go, however, and so the tricycle stopped and held them prisoners.

"Dat's got 'em, Marse Frank. Dats got 'em! Whoop!" and Pomp danced about with the greatest glee imaginable.

"Yes, we've got 'em," said Frank. "Now jump out, Pomp, and run up there and cut those prisoners loose. Tell them we are their friends come to release them. Don't touch anything with both hands as you go out, or you'll get your teeth shaken out of your head."

Pomp opened the door and sprang out. He ran up to the four prisoners and told them they were free, and cut the cords that bound them. They followed him back to the tricycle, as much amazed as the red-skins themselves.

"Now, Pomp, get their rifles and other weapons," cried Frank. "Then I'll give 'em a regular knock-down, and let 'em drop so you can come in."

"Yes, sah," and the faithful darkey went to work and secured every weapon the red rascals had.

Then Frank gave them another shock that knocked the whole gang insensible, after which he let up. They dropped down like so many dead men.

"Now come inside, gentlemen."

Pomp motioned to the four white men to enter the cage. They did so, and Frank asked:

"Which of you is Mr. Hammond?"

"I am," said one of the men, who seemed to have been suffering intense mental agony.

"Well, your daughter is safe with old Joe Bedford's train again."

"Thank God!" and the tears broke from his eyes and trickled down his bronzed cheeks.

Frank and Jack said nothing. The three men clasped his hands in silent sympathy.

Suddenly the father turned to Frank, and asked:

"And you—did you save her?"

"My friend there," pointing to Jack, "and myself came across her, and carried her back to the train."

"God bless you, sir—both of you! A father's blessing shall be yours," and he grasped their hands in his great joy, and wrung them with all his strength.

By this time the lightning-struck Indians began to recover consciousness. They raised themselves to sitting positions, and glanced around, as though in doubt as to where they were. Then they would feel of themselves to see if they were all there.

Jumping Wolf staggered to his feet, and glared at his warriors like one in a dream.

"Hello, Jumping Wolf!" cried Frank. "How do you feel now?"

"Ugh!" grunted the chief, feeling himself all over. "Ugh! me great chief."

"Of course you are, and a great fool, too. What do you think of the young Lightning Chief?"

"Pale-face great chief," admitted Jumping Wolf, too much puzzled over what had happened to know what he was saying. He continued feeling himself, as though doubtful as to whether he was really all together.

"What's the matter with you, chief?" Frank asked, at which the whites chuckled with considerable glee.

"Ugh! Pale-face heap big fool," grunted the chief, angrily.

Other Indians now began to get on their feet and glare around as though uncertain about everything in existence.

Suddenly the bell of the tricycle began to ring. The reds started in surprise, and the next moment they saw the whole thing gliding away from them over the prairie.

The tricycle was off.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE SHERIFF'S CARRIAGE."

On the way back Jack explained the whole thing to Mr. Hammond and his three friends. The happy father was profuse in his expressions of gratitude.

"When can we reach them?" he asked.

"To-night," replied Frank. "We have such a heavy load that I'm afraid to put on any more power."

"It's the most wonderful thing I ever heard of," said Hammond. "It beats the great steam-man of the plains, which I remember seeing several years ago."

"Mr. Reade here is the son of the steam-man inventor," remarked Jack.

"Good Lord! is that so?"

"Yes, sir; that's Frank Reade, Jr., the inventor of this thing."

Hammond almost hugged him to his heart, and the others pressed his hand with the most hearty enthusiasm.

That night they reached the camp again, and a general shout of joy went up from all the emigrants when they heard the tricycle's bell and saw the electric light. They ran out to meet it, and the cry went up:

"Did you find 'em?"

"Yes, they are all here!" replied Jack.

"Oh, father! father!" screamed Ella Hammond, running alongside the tricycle.

"My child! my child!" cried the happy father, bursting into tears. "Thank God, we are together again!"

Frank stopped the tricycle to let the rescued men get out. Such hugging, kissing and glad hand-shaking as took place then! The young inventor thought he was well paid for what he had done.

There was general rejoicing in the camp that night, as Frank turned over to the emigrants all the rifles that had been captured from Jumping Wolf's band. They knew that they would have arms enough for all the women to have a rifle each in case of another attack.

The young inventor spent the night at the camp, and during the evening Ella Hammond extracted a promise out of Frank to the effect that he would pay a visit to the White River settlement soon.

She was satisfied with that, and was the happiest maiden in the camp that night.

The next morning our heroes left to go in search of the rendezvous of the robber band that Todd had belonged to.

"Now, you understand," said Frank, turning to the robber, "that the least attempt at deception, or to escape, and I take back my promise of amnesty to you."

"Yes, I understand all that well enough. There is no danger of my tampering with my life. I am not a fool if I am a robber."

"All right. Now let us know of every house on the route, if there are any, where the robbers are in the habit of stopping."

"There's a farm-house over on Cottonwood

Creek that belongs to the band. It's where they carry horses, and change their spots, or put spots on 'em."

"How far is it from here?"

"It must be at least fifty miles."

"Which way?"

"Off to the right here."

"Can we get there with this tricycle?"

"Yes; wagons go there."

"Then we can go," and he turned the tricycle in that direction.

Two hours later they came in sight of the tall timber of Cottonwood Creek, and skirted along on the west side of it till Todd pointed out a place where the tricycle could cross.

"Look here, Frank," said Jack, after they had crossed the creek, "have you thought of what you will do with the prisoners you capture?"

"No, I haven't thought of that. Why?"

"Well, if you carry them to the nearest magistrate, you have no witnesses against them, and they'll all get free again in a few weeks."

"That's so. I never thought of that. Well, we'll provoke a fight and wipe 'em out. That's the best way, I guess. How many men are at the farm, Todd?"

"There are generally four or five. Sometimes a dozen, or even more, as they may come in."

"Yes, I understand. Well, we'll go to the farm and see about it. We'll manage to get 'em out of the house some way, and then provoke a fight."

"There's the house now, over there," said Todd. "Go round that hill, over that way, and you'll fetch up in front of it."

Frank followed his instructions to the letter, and soon found himself in front of a large farmhouse, one and a half stories high. There was a piazza in front, and two smaller houses in the rear, besides a large barn and stable still further back. The place looked as though a highly prosperous farmer lived there.

Hitched to posts in front of the gate were three very fine horses, with saddles on, indicating that at least that number of men had been added to the force of the band at this point.

Frank stopped the tricycle and commenced ringing the bell very violently.

Just as he expected, every soul on the place came running forward to see what it meant. There were seven men, a dozen dogs, and three women in the party that ran out to see about it.

Words cannot express their astonishment at seeing the tricycle. How it came there and what it was were puzzling questions.

Every man had his inevitable revolver buckled around him.

"Hello!" exclaimed the man who pretended to be the farmer of the place. "What's this?"

"It's a sheriff's carriage," was Frank's reply.

The word "sheriff" was ever a declaration of war among evil-doers, and in this instance it proved doubly so.

"Sheriff, eh?" exclaimed the leader, drawing his weapon, as did the other six. "Come and take us!"

"Oh, they're going to fight," exclaimed the women, turning and speeding back to the house. One of the men fired a pistol at Jack.

That was the signal, and then the Winchesters commenced their deadly work.

Jack, Frank and Pomp fired simultaneously, and three men fell dead.

Crack! crack! crack! and three more went down. The seventh and last man turned to run, when a bullet through his back laid him out.

"That ends the seven," said Jack.

"Yes—wiped out," said Frank.

"My God, Mr. Reade!" exclaimed Todd, "you can wipe out all the Indians on the plains with this thing."

"Yes. We are going to wipe out this band of robbers with it. I say, Jack, let's settle the dogs, too."

"All right."

The dogs then caught it right and left, and in just three minutes more there was not a live canine on the place.

"Now, Jack," said Frank, "you stay here and keep your eye on things, and Pomp and I

will go into the house and see what we can find. Is there any treasure kept here, Todd?"

"No—only horses, that's all."

"Well, I'll go in and talk to the women. Come on, Pomp."

He led the way to the house. Just as he reached the top step, the door flew open, and three women, with upraised axes in their hands, rushed at him.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARTHA DAMPER, THE ROBBER'S WIDOW.

HAD a band of hideously painted Indians rushed out upon him, the young inventor could not have been more astonished, than when he saw the three women coming with uplifted axes.

"Look out dar!" yelled Pomp, springing back in time to save himself. "What youse gwine ter do? Hole on dar, I tole yer!"

"Stop, or I'll fire!" cried Frank, in a tone intended to be stern and fearless.

"You have killed our husbands!" cried one of the women, "now kill us, but we will kill you first!" and if the young inventor had not nimbly sprang aside he would have been killed then and there. The virago aimed a terrific blow at his head with the ax; the blow, missing its aim, sent the weapon flying from her grasp.

"I have no desire to harm you, ladies," said Frank. "I only want to—"

"Kill the wretch!" screamed the woman who had lost her ax. "Cut him down! He dare not shoot a woman."

Another woman advanced on him with her ax upraised. There was a fierceness in her eyes that told our hero that she was the most dangerous of the trio. But while he was determined not to shoot or strike her except in absolute defense of life, he was equally resolved not to let them bluff him. He presented his revolver at the head of the Amazon, and hissed through his clenched teeth:

"If you think I dare not defend my life at the expense of yours, come one step farther!"

His air and tone caused the woman to stop and hesitate.

"If seven men could not stop me, how will three women manage it?" he asked.

"What do you want here?" one of the women asked.

"You know my business here as well as I do, madam," he replied. "I have come out to break up this band of robbers, and if you would save yourselves, you will get away from here in three days' time."

"Do you think you can destroy a band of one hundred men?" one of the women asked, in a contemptuous tone of voice.

"One hundred or one thousand, it's all the same to me. We can destroy seventy men as easily as we wiped out those seven men out there. Be not deceived, madam, the days of this band are numbered."

"You have killed all the men on this place," the eldest of the three women said. "What more do you want here? Go your way and let us go ours."

"I must search the place and—"

"But you shall not!" exclaimed the woman, again taking her ax and placing herself in a defensive attitude. "You can only do so after you have killed us!"

"Yes; after you have killed all three of us," added the third one, speaking for the first time.

"Stand out of my way, madam! Think you I will be balked by such as you? Out of my way!"

Frank again advanced toward the door of the house, when the three women made a rush at him, two of them flourishing axes above their heads, as if they meant murder.

Frank sprang back just in time to save himself. The eldest woman glared at him and hissed through her clenched teeth:

"I never struck any one in my life, but if you don't leave here I will split your head open!"

"Indeed, you will not, madam," he replied. "for if you do not get out of my way I will shoot you."

"You wouldn't dare shoot a woman," she said.

"In the discharge of my duty I dare do anything," retorted he.

The woman started toward him.

He raised his revolver and aimed at her head. She never flinched, but advanced almost to within striking distance of him.

"Madam," he said, "you are right. I can not shoot a woman. I will retire, and send a company of United States soldiers to look after you."

"Begone, then, as quick as you came," she said. "You are the only man I ever saw who n I could kill. If I had a pistol I would shoot you."

"Madam, if you would escape a prison for being a member of—"

"I am only a widow now," she said, "and that is no crime. Go away before I do you an injury."

"Come away, Pomp," and Frank led the way back to the tricycle, where they entered the cage.

"She's a tough one, eh, Frank?" said Jack.

"Yes; beat me at a square game of bluff."

"It was no bluff on her part, sir," remarked Todd. "Mrs. Damper is a dangerous woman."

She would have given you that ax as sure as fate if you had persisted on entering the house."

"She put a damper on me," and he laughed softly. "She wouldn't be bluffed."

"No; I could see that plain enough."

"See here, Todd, what's in that house that the woman don't wish us to see?"

"I don't know, sir. I have never seen anything there except what one might see in any ordinary farm-house."

"Well, it's very strange, to say the least of it," remarked Frank, "and I am more than half inclined to return and—"

"If you do, you will either have to shoot a woman or be killed yourself," said Todd, "for I know that Mrs. Damper well. She once shot one of the band for a trifle. She's a dangerous woman."

"She's coming out again," said Jack, as the door of the house opened and Mrs. Damper appeared. She had gone into the house as Frank retired to the tricycle.

"What does she want now, I wonder? Why, the other two are coming with her!"

The three women came up to the tricycle and made bold to get up near enough to the wire cage to distinctly see the four men inside of it.

"Ah! I thought so," exclaimed Mrs. Damper, her eyes flashing like an enraged tigress. "So you are the traitor, are you, Todd?"

"No, I am no traitor," replied Todd. "I am a prisoner. The others were killed."

"You piloted the way here—you have given the whole band away. But you shall not escape thus. "Die, wretch!" and with that she drew a revolver from the folds of her dress, and fired at him.

Of course the wire cage protected them from the shot. The woman was astonished that she had not hit her mark.

She dropped the pistol, and caught hold of the big wheel in front of her with both hands. The next moment Frank sent the electric current coursing around the tricycle. She caught a tremendous shock. Her hands convulsively grasped the wheel, and her eyes distended with a glare of terror in them. Then a shriek, a scream more fully tinged with mortal fear than any Jack Middleton had ever yet heard human voice give utterance, burst from her lips.

Scream after scream rent the air, and the savage dame bounced up and down like a turkey on a hot oven. The other two women screamed in unison with her without knowing why, and so the concert went on.

Suddenly Frank stopped the current of electricity, and Mrs. Damper was released. She did not stop to look around to see what had caused such a series of shocks to her frame, but turned and fled as from a terrible pestilence, or some even more terrible evil.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Frank. "She will never forget that experience."

"Nor forgive it," put in Todd. "You have made Martha Damper your enemy for life, Mr. Reade."

"I could not have made her my friend after killing her husband," said Frank.

"No; but now she will follow you for revenge."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes; she followed a man a thousand miles once and made him weaken."

"She has got plenty of nerve, I guess," remarked Frank.

"Plenty of it, and she never forgives."

"Well, I shall be on the lookout for her. But I don't think I shall ever see her again," and with that the young inventor started the tricycle, turning and retracing his tracks.

"Now, where is the nearest other rendezvous of the band?" he asked of Todd.

"About sixty miles above here," was the reply.

"Can't we get to it?"

"Yes."

"All right, then. Shall I strike north?"

"Yes."

The tricycle was soon flying over the plains in the direction indicated, and, in less than three hours, time was in the vicinity of the rendezvous, which was another pretended farm-house.

"How many men usually stay here?" Frank asked of Todd.

"Some five or six; but I don't know how many are here now."

"Of course not. We must chance all that," and then, as they approached the house he commenced ringing the bell.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DYING ROBBER'S STORY—REPARATION AT LAST.

THE ringing of a bell was such an unusual thing in that part of the world that every man and woman on the place came running forward to see about it.

Of course the sight of the tricycle, a craft they had never seen or heard of before, filled them with a profound curiosity.

There were five men and three women on the place.

"Hello!" cried Frank, as the whole party came trooping around the tricycle. "Whose place is this?"

"It's Morgan's ranch," replied one of the party. "Who are you, and where do you hail from?"

"Oh, we are a party of gentlemen from the East on a pleasure excursion."

The reply did not seem satisfactory to the robbers. They exchanged significant glances, and then looked into the cage as if to get a closer view of those inside.

One of the women recognized the prisoner, Todd, and exclaimed:

"Why, Todd, what are you doing in there?"

The five men started as if stung, and pressed forward to get a good view of the man whose name they had just heard.

"I am acting as guide for the gentlemen," replied Todd, as coolly as he could.

"The devil!" exclaimed one of the robbers; "and you have guided them here! Take that for a fool!" and quick as a flash he drew a revolver, and aiming at him through the wires pulled the trigger.

The bullet flattened against the wires, and fell to the ground. One, two, three more shots were fired with a like result.

Crack! crack! crack! went three revolvers in the hands of Frank, Jack, and Pomp. Three of the robbers staggered away from the tricycle and fell to the ground. They had received their death-wounds.

The other two were dumbfounded with the sudden disaster.

They turned to fly to the house, whither the women were now running.

Crack! crack! went two more shots, and the two men fell, shot in their backs.

"This is horrible!" exclaimed Jack. "Five more white men killed!"

"Call them coyotes, and you won't see anything horrible about it," said Frank. "Those men would murder a man for his horse or purse. We are doing the world a service in wiping them out."

"Yes, I suppose we are; but they are human beings for all that."

"So they are, but not such as ought to live. Come, Pomp, let's go into the house, and see what they have there."

"Yes, sah."

They opened the door of the cage and passed out.

Only one of the five men was now alive. He was one of those who had been shot in the back.

Seeing our hero approach, he raised himself on his elbow and said:

"You have wiped me out. I am going," and he gave a gasp that caused blood to flow from his mouth.

"I am sorry we had to do it, sir," said Frank; "but the band must be broken up, you know."

"Yes—I—I knew it—would come to this some time. Come here. I want—to—tell you—something."

Frank knelt by the dying man's side, and said:

"What is it you have got to say? If there is anything on your conscience that troubles you, it may be better for you in the next world if you will make a clean breast of it here now."

"Yes, yes; my conscience is loaded down with crime. My name is Will Somers, but I was known in the band as Sam Sickles. My parents reside in Virginia, and they don't know that I am the wretched criminal that I am. I would not have them know it. But before I die I want to do an act of justice to an innocent man and a good woman. In the city of Lynchburg there lives a beautiful woman by the name of Kate Muncy. I loved her with a passionate love such as seldom ever filled the heart of man. But she loved another, and so rejected me. She did it kindly, tenderly; but the wound was none the less poignant on that account. As for my rival, I hated him as much as I loved her, and my soul became terribly vindictive and eager in its desire to destroy him. But I could not make up my mind to kill him. But I resolved that he should not have her, and I began to devise ways and means to prevent the marriage. One day at church I saw him drop a handkerchief. Something prompted me to pick it up and conceal it in my pocket. When I examined it in the solitude of my own room, I found that in the corner his initials had been worked in blue silk, and 'K. M.' in pink beneath them. I knew then that the handkerchief had been presented to him by her, and that the initials were her own handiwork. I gazed at it till a demoniacal spirit took possession of me. I resolved on a desperate scheme for revenge on both of them, and, at the same time, prevent the marriage. That night, with a small vial of chloroform, and the handkerchief in my pocket, I made my way into her parent's residence, by means of skeleton-keys, and entered her sleeping apartment. She was sleeping soundly. I could see her sweet face by the ray of moonlight that penetrated into the room. Saturating the handkerchief with the chloroform I applied it to her nose without waking her, and in a few minutes she was under the influence of it. Then it was that I passionately kissed her lips, as I drew two diamond rings from her fingers, and also took the diamond brooch and earrings that lay on her dressing-case.

"Then, with a farewell kiss I left the room, leaving the handkerchief lying on the floor, as if by accident. The next morning the robbery was discovered, and the tell-tale handkerchief pointed to my rival as the guilty one. She would not believe it for some time, but her stern father had him arrested, and though he was acquitted at the trial, it broke off the match, she having been persuaded that he was guilty. Then I renewed my addresses, but she told me her heart was dead, and could never love again. In my despair I came West, began drinking and gambling, passing from one degree of crime to another, till I finally connected myself with the road-agents. Here, in a wallet next my heart, you will find the two rings, earrings, and brooch that belong to Kate Muncy. Take or send them to her, and tell her that Edwin was innocent of the robbery—that I did it, and that now, with my last breath I declare

that my mad, passionate love for her urged me to commit the crime."

The man was going fast; his voice faltered, and at times he spoke with difficulty.

"I shall do just as you desire," said Frank to him. "Have you anything else to say?"

"No—nothing that I can right. I have robbed and murdered, but that can't be mended. Oh, God, to die thus! Give me—some water."

"Pomp, run into the house and get some water," said Frank to his faithful black.

"Yes, sah," and Pomp started to the house as ordered.

The women had been watching from one of the windows. They saw that the black was sent for something, and when they learned what it was, they promptly gave it to him.

He returned with a large tin cup full of water.

Frank took it, and held it to the dying man's lips. He drank it eagerly, and then heaved a sigh, and said:

"Don't let my parents know of this. Tell Kate to forgive and keep it a secret from them."

Then he gasped again, breathed hard a few times, and muttered:

"Kate! Kate! Forgive me—I—was—mad! Mother! Oh, how dark! I—I—ah!"

Another gasp and the man was dead.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ROBBER'S WIDOWS.

"THAT is the end of a life of crime," said Frank, looking down at the face of the dead man. "He had done an act of justice, however, and I shall do my best toward making it good. It may make two hearts happy that are now miserable."

He ran his hand into the inner pocket of the dead man's vest, and took therefrom and old, greasy, well-worn wallet. Opening it hastily he saw that the jewels he had mentioned were there.

"The man told the truth," he said, placing the wallet in his pocket. "I shall deliver these to whom they belong."

Rising to his feet, he started into the house. As he reached the steps of the piazza he saw the blanched faces of three women at a window. They were watching his movements with evident apprehensions.

Opening the door, he stepped into the room and confronted the women.

Removing his hat he bowed, and said:

"Be not disturbed, ladies. I know that you are not responsible for the crimes of the men of this band. You shall not in the least be distressed, except by the death of your male friends."

His words reassured them. They breathed freer, and one of them said:

"We thank you ever so much, sir. We are indeed not responsible for any crimes that have been committed, notwithstanding our presence here."

"I believe you, madam. I know that many women cling to those they love, even when crime has made them unworthy of their love. I am sorry for you all. Have any of you lost husbands by my presence here?"

"Yes," said one; "my husband lies dead out there."

Frank looked hard at her for a minute or two. He saw no signs of grief in her face.

"You did not love him, madam?" he said.

"No, sir. I once loved him, but love has long since died in my heart. He was cruel to me, and did me a wrong no woman can ever forgive."

"Ah! You have had a sad life. And these other two ladies?"

"Their husbands are away on a raid of some kind," said the first speaker. "They do not love them any more than I do mine."

"Indeed I do!" exclaimed one of the women, who was not older than twenty-five years, and very good-looking. "My husband may be a very wicked man, but he is kind to me, and I love him."

"How many went away on this raid, and which way did they go?" Frank asked.

"There were ten men in the party," was the reply, "and they went in a southerly direction."

Frank started.

"Did you know if there was a man by the name of Todd in the party?" he asked.

"Yes—Todd was with them!"

"Then your husband is dead, madam, for Todd is the only man of the party who is alive at this moment."

The widow gasped, as if to catch her breath, and staggering back a few paces dropped into a seat.

"How know you that?" she asked, in a husky tone of voice.

"Because I saw them hanged," was the reply.

"My husband was there too," said the third woman, a quiet sad-eyed woman of some thirty years of age. "But I did not love him. We were never married. He captured me and compelled me to live with him as his wife."

"Then you are avenged, madam," said Frank. "Punishment overtakes such men sooner or later, and it is terrible when it comes. Again I say I am sorry for all. If there is any treasure about the house, take it and divide it among yourselves; you may need it. We shall not trouble you any farther than to ask for a supper, as it is near sunset."

"Oh, we will do anything for you, sir," said the tallest of the three women. "You are so kind to us. Come, Emma, let's get a supper for the gentlemen."

The two women left the room together, leaving the third one sitting in a chair, weeping as if her heart would break.

"Madam," said Frank to her, "I wish I could comfort you. You look like a good woman. I know your husband was not worthy of your love. You are young and beautiful; time will heal your grief, and then, when you are removed from the surroundings of your present life, you will find an honorable man who will devote his life to your happiness."

She looked up at him through her tears, and asked:

"Do you really think I could ever marry again?"

"I haven't a doubt of it, madam," was his reply, "for you are a beautiful woman," and he looked at her as though he was himself deeply smitten by her charms. He saw she was a weak, vain woman, who did not love her husband with anything more than a passing fancy. "Are you married?" she asked, to his intense amazement.

"No, madam. I am a single man and heart-free."

She dried her tears and began to smile. He smiled too. He really could not help it.

"It's a mash," he muttered to himself, as he looked at the silly creature.

"You—have not—told us your name, sir," she simpered.

"Ah! Yes—pardon my seeming negligence," he said, with mock politeness. "My name is Frank Simcoe Simpkins, the sinner."

She looked up at him with a flutter of surprise.

"I have heard of you," she said, "and always thought I would like to see you. You are a great detective, are you not?"

"Yes, madam. I am engaged at present in destroying all the male members of this band of road-agents, after which all the women belonging to it are to be supplied with new husbands."

"Oh, how kind of you! And will new husbands really be found for the women?"

"Yes. It will be an act of justice to the poor widows who were not responsible for their late husbands' crimes."

"Yes—yes—that's so. And will they let the widows pick their husbands?"

"They will give them the right to accept or refuse any man that is offered," said the young rascal, laughing in his sleeve all the time.

They sat there talking for some time, when Pomp, who was standing in the door, exclaimed:

"Marse Frank, dere's some more comin' dis way!"

Frank sprang up and rushed to the door.

Sure enough, a party of a half dozen horsemen were seen coming rapidly toward the house.

"Come, Pomp, let's get back to the tricycle!" he exclaimed.

They hurried out into the yard, and reached the tricycle just as the men rode up and surrounded it. The sight of the dead men on the ground told them that, whoever the strangers were, they were enemies, and so they drew their revolvers and yelled:

"Surrender, or we'll blow you to Kingdom Come!"

"Oh, don't now," said Frank sarcastically.

"Who are you?" demanded the leader of the party.

"Never mind who we are. We are here on business, and we have performed our business."

"By murdering our friends. Kill 'em, boys," and the leader shot at Frank in the cage.

Of course their fire was harmless; the next moment the deadly Winchesters commenced their work, and in just two minutes every man of them was done for.

They lay on the ground gasping away their lives, and soon each robber had given up the ghost.

The women ran to the piazza again, only to see their robber friends bite the dust.

"Thus you see how the band is melting away," said Frank, as he descended from the tricycle again. "They cannot harm us in there, so we remain unhurt. Do you think any more will return to-night?"

"No, sir," replied the tall woman.

"Then return to your work and we will place these out of the way. Pomp, get the picks and spades—"

"There's an old dry well in the corner of the barn out there," said the handsome widow.

"Yes," said Todd. "You need not dig any grave. You can just throw them in there and dig a little loose earth to cover them with."

"That's a good idea—take 'em up, Pomp, and throw 'em in. See if they have any valuables about them first."

"Yes, sah," and the brave old black went to work at his very unpleasant task.

Frank again went into the house. He wanted to question the handsome widow about the man known as Sam Sickles.

The widow received him with a smile and said:

"You are a wonderful hero, sir."

"Thanks, madam. The praise of a handsome widow is an incentive to valiant deeds, and—Hello!"

That exclamation was drawn from him by a man who rushed at him from an adjoining room with an uplifted bowie-knife in his hand.

CHAPTER XXII.

FRANK READE, JR.'S, PERIL—THE ROBBER'S WIDOW.

THE man came at him with an oath hissing through his clenched teeth. His eyes glared like those of a madman's.

The widow screamed and sprang to her feet. Frank retreated to the further end of the room and drew his revolver. The man still advanced upon him, and the young inventor, seeing there was no other recourse, raised his weapon and fired.

The man threw up both hands and the bowie fell from his grasp, its point sticking in the floor, leaving the handle pointing toward the ceiling. Clutching wildly at space, the man wheeled round, and staggered toward the door of the room whence he came. But ere he gained it he fell heavily to the floor, and a stream of blood issued from his mouth.

"It was my life or his, madam," said Frank, turning to the widow, whose blanched face gave evidence of the terrible fright she had endured.

"Yes," she said; "he would have killed you. Oh! this is awful!"

"Yet you must have expected it some day, ma'am. You surely knew that the band would be destroyed after awhile."

"Yes—yes—I did think so, and yet it is none the less horrible. Oh, if I was a thousand miles from here!"

"No harm will come to you on account of the past. Who was this man?"

"He was second in command of the band," was the reply. "He has been ill several days, and was in bed when you came."

"Well, he has passed in his checks now. He must have been a hard case, judging from his looks."

"He was a very bad man, sir."

"Are there any more men in the house?"

"No, sir."

"One of you said that before."

"I don't think she meant to deceive you, sir. She thought he had gone out with the others."

"Please lead the way through the house—into all the rooms, and let me see for myself." She looked at him reproachfully.

"You don't believe me, sir?"

"I have to be cautious, madam."

She turned and led the way into the other room, stepping over the dead body of the robber as she did so.

"Pomp," said Frank, "remain here till I come back. Use your revolver on man or woman the moment you perceive any treachery going on."

"Yes, sah."

Frank then followed the widow through all the rooms of the house, and saw that she had told the truth. They were no other men in the house.

In one room she turned to him and said:

"This is my room, and you are the only man who has been in it since my husband went away."

"He will never come back, madam," said Frank. "I think you three ladies had better divide the plunder between you and get away as soon as possible."

"But how are we to get away?"

"Mount fleet horses and ride, of course."

"Without any male escort! Why, we would be lost, sir, if we met Indians or partners of the band. You don't know them as well as I do, sir."

"I know them but too well, and can understand that what you say is true. Perhaps you had better remain here till we visit the other places and dispose of the whole band."

"Then you will come and take us away?"

"I will try to," was the reply.

"Oh, you are as kind as you are brave!"

"Supper is ready," called out one of the women at the rear of the house.

"Come," said the widow, "I know you must be hungry. Supper is ready."

Frank turned and escorted the widow into the dining-room, where the other two women were waiting for them. He saw that they had prepared a good supper of bread, coffee, eggs, and venison steaks.

"Ladies," he said, "excuse me if I send for my pard to share this meal with us. He is handsome, brave and unmarried."

All three ladies laughed.

"Send for him by all means," said the handsome widow, who had regained her animal spirits to a charming degree.

He sent Pomp to take Jack's place in the tricycle, and let the latter come into the house. In a couple of minutes Jack appeared.

"Jack, the ladies desire your company at supper," said Frank, as his handsome young friend entered the room.

"I assure you, ladies," said Jack, removing his hat and bowing like a Frenchman, "I appreciate the honor."

They all five sat down to the table, and ate heartily of the good things before them. The women did not seem in the least depressed over the events of the day. On the contrary, they seemed to feel that they had been emancipated from a galling species of slavery.

"Now, ladies," said Frank, after they had finished the meal, "we will remain here for the night. You can have the entire house to yourselves. We will sleep in our cage. To-morrow morning we will breakfast with you, I agreeable, and then take ourselves off."

"But you will visit us again, will you not?" the widow asked.

"Oh, yes. We will not leave you in the lurch. We will come again—in a few days, probably."

Then Jack and Frank took leave of them for the night, carrying with them a good supper for Pomp and the prisoner Todd.

The next morning they found a hot breakfast awaiting them, of which they ate heartily. Then they shook hands with the women, and re-entered the tricycle.

"Now, Todd," said Frank to the prisoner, "you have kept faith with us so far. I am pleased with you, and hope you have made up your mind to turn over a new leaf."

"So I have, sir," was the reply. "In showing you all the places of the band I am doing just what I promised. If any of them escape, I will have to go to the other end of the world to escape their vengeance. So you see it is too late for me to regret what I have done."

"Yes, that's so. I see your position. But you would have fallen a victim to the law some time, so you have escaped a very certain danger for an uncertain one."

"I know that. Yet I think you had better wipe out the whole band whilst you are at it."

"So do I," put in Frank.

"I say—are we going in the right direction for the next place?" Jack asked of the prisoner?

"Yes, sir, and it's not more than twenty miles from the last place."

"How many men are there?"

"About like the other places. There may be only three or four, and still there may be a dozen there."

"Well, it makes no difference to us how many are there. We want to know how to shape our course so as to make it a success."

The tricycle was now out upon the prairie again, going at a rapid rate. They had to make a circuit of nearly forty miles in order to avoid an impassable strip of timber and a stream.

But they soon made the distance, and the bogus farm-house came into view. It was not unlike the others in appearance, and seemed to be the home of a prosperous farmer.

The same dodge of ringing the bell of the tricycle, which had been found so effective at the other two places, was resorted to. Of course everybody on the premises ran out to see what it meant, and our hero had a chance to get at the strength of the robbers.

"Hello! Who are you?" demanded a fine-looking, stalwart man, apparently about forty years of age.

"By all the saints!" exclaimed Todd, in a low tone of voice. "That's the captain of the band!"

"The robber captain?"

"Yes—Captain Ball."

"That's his name—Ball?"

"That's all any one knows."

Frank and Jack gazed at the leader of the road-agents with no little curiosity. They saw that he was no ordinary character. He had a quick, nervous way about him, and was evidently a man of decision and strong personal magnetism. He carried a bowie-knife and a brace of six-shooters in his belt, and altogether was a man one would not dare wontonly to provoke.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ANOTHER TERRIBLE TALE OF VILLAINY.

THE robber captain looked at the tricycle with no little degree of interest whilst waiting for an answer to his question. The space of a minute had elapsed and still no answer had been vouchsafed.

Laying his hand on a revolver, he sternly asked again:

"Who are you, and what do you want here?"

"We are gentlemen on a pleasure trip," said Frank, "and we are not in the habit of being addressed in a menacing manner. Who are you?"

"I am Captain Ball," was the quiet reply, "and am in the habit of addressing others as I please. If you don't like my style say so and I'll—"

"I don't like your style, Captain Ball," interrupted Frank. "It savors too much of the coward and bully."

"Red-hot brimstone!" gasped the captain. "This to me?"

"Yes. You are a cowardly bully to thus insult quiet, peaceable citizens who gave no offense."

"Stranger, you have committed suicide. I am sorry for you. Take hold of the thing and shake 'em out of it, boys."

A half-dozen men sprang forward and seized hold of the tricycle, whilst their leader stood by with a revolver in his right hand.

Frank promptly gave them a current of electricity, to tackle which shocked them into convulsions.

They raised themselves on their toes and howled. Their hair stood up on their heads and their eyes seemed about to pop out of their sockets.

"Over with it!" exclaimed the robber captain. "What in perdition is the matter with you?"

They couldn't speak. They could only squirm and howl.

"Ten thousand furies!" roared the captain, "what is it? What's the matter?"

He ran around the tricycle, and looked at it in profound amazement. That some mysterious, unseen power had gotten a grip on his men he could plainly see. But what was it, and whence came it?

"What does this mean?" he demanded, looking up through the cage at our hero. "Release my men or I'll blow your brains out!"

"How about the suicide?" Frank asked.

In reply, the robber chief raised his revolver and fired quickly at our hero.

"Ah! now you mean business!" exclaimed Frank, returning the shot through one of the little port-holes. "How's that for one?"

The shot broke the pistol-arm of the villain.

"Curses on you!" he hissed, as the weapon fell to the ground, "you have broken my arm!"

"Ah! Did I? Well, really, I meant the other one," and, firing again, he sent a bullet through the left arm of the captain.

"Ten thousand maledictions!" yelled the enraged chief, leaping about like a madman.

The blood trickled down both arms, and dropped from the tips of his fingers. He was helpless as a babe, so far as resistance was concerned.

"You see it won't do to be a bully!" said Frank, raising his voice above the howls and screeches of the men in the terrible coils of the electric current.

"Come out of that and I will kick the sand out of you!" yelled the captain, who was really a man of splendid courage.

Frank merely laughed at him, and then turned to Jack and asked:

"What shall we do with these fellows who are holding to the tricycle?"

"They are robbers and murderers, and you know what fate the deserve."

"Yes, yes; but I hate to destroy human life this way. We can't take them to any jail, so the only way to break up the band is to kill 'em off. Jack and I'll give 'em a stroke of lightning, and it will be in self-defense, too, you understand?"

"Yes, of course. Why, they would murder us all if they could."

"That so," said Todd; "they are all murderers."

Frank turned and laid a hand on the electric battery knob and gave it a sudden wrench. The howls of the squirming wretches instantly ceased, and they dropped to the ground in limp lifelessness.

"Ten thousand fiends!" groaned the robber captain, his face turning ashen pale as he beheld the destruction of his followers. "Who are you? What are you?"

"We are gentlemen on a pleasure trip," replied Frank, opening the cage door of the tricycle and stepped outside, "and our greatest pleasure is in winding up the careers of men like you."

The robber captain was amazed. He read his fate in the words of the daring young inventor.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting and destroying three gangs of your men, captain.

One of your followers is here. Mr. Todd has saved his neck by agreeing to conduct us to every station and rendezvous belonging to the band."

Ball glared at Todd, and hissed through his clenched teeth:

"Traitor!"

"I am no traitor, captain. The end had come. My death could not save the band. The band was doomed anyhow. I only bargained for my life, and everything a man has he will give for his life."

"That's the talk of a coward and traitor," hissed Captain Ball.

"You would use the same talk if it would save your neck," said Todd.

"Never!"

"Well, never mind about that," said Frank, "the doom of the band is sealed. There are but a few more left, and they will soon be wiped out. Have you anything to say, captain, before we string you up?"

"String me up?"

"Yes—you are to hang to yonder limb in a few minutes from now."

"Without a trial for my life?"

"Yes—you will have no trial."

"But—I—demand a trial."

"Did you ever allow one of your victims a chance for his life, Captain Ball?" the young inventor asked.

"But—but—"

"No nonsense, now. Have you not sent victims into eternity without giving 'em any show for their lives?"

"You don't know that I ever did, nor can you prove it."

"Indeed I do know it, and could prove it, but to do so would be giving you the benefit of a trial, a thing I am not going to do. Todd, you shall be executioner. You may hang him to yonder limb, and the sooner you do so the better."

"I—I—didn't bargain for that, Mr. Reade," faltered Todd, turning ashen pale.

"Do you object?"

The prisoner remained silent.

"Well, I won't ask you to do it. Pomp, get a rope."

"Yes, sah."

A rope was produced, and a noose made at one end of it.

A wild scream startled our heroes.

A young, beautiful woman ran screaming from the house.

"Spare him! Spare my husband!" she cried, rushing forward and throwing herself on her knees at Frank's feet. "Have mercy! mercy!"

"Who are you, madam?"

"I am his wife. I love him! He is all I have in the world! Spare him! Spare my husband!"

"Madam, your husband is a robber and a murderer."

"I know it! I know it!" she sobbed, "but I love him! I love him! He has been kind to me, and—"

"Yes!" screamed another female voice, as another rushed forward from the house; "he has been kind to you, but cruel to me—his lawful wife. She is young and pretty. I am not, and you deserted me for her, Jules Cantaire!" and she turned on the wounded and doomed robber with the fury of a tigress. "I told you God would avenge me for your cruel desertion. You left me to the insults of every wretch in the band, and showered your love and protection on her, though we were lawfully wedded in the cathedral at New Orleans, when you were an honest man. Ha, ha, ha! I am avenged! She is on her knees begging another to spare your wretched life. I will talk against her. I have no love left in this heart of mine. You trampled it under foot, crushed it, and now I will denounce you. Sir," and she turned to Frank, "he murdered an old man in New Orleans, and fled to the plains. I was infatuated with him then, and clung to him. He organized a band of robbers and murderers like himself, and I have seen him shoot down men in cold blood. He never showed mercy to any one in his life. Why should any be shown to him now? Hang him!"

Hang him as he deserves! Ha, ha, ha! Hang him. Jules Cantaire, you will hang, and all her tears can't save you! Ha, ha, ha! I am avenged!"

The poor woman was evidently out of her mind, but she had been made so by the wretch who had wedded her lawfully in the days when he was untainted with crime.

"You are a precious scoundrel," said Frank, turning to the trembling wretch, who was now as pale as death and weak from the loss of blood.

"Spare him! Oh, spare him!" pleaded the young woman again.

"No," said Frank, "he is a double-dyed villain, and you are not much better. You have robbed that poor woman of a husband. Pomp, swing him up!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RIVALS.

WE draw the curtain over the scene of the execution of the leader of the band of road-agents. To depict it would be but a repetition of an old story. The murdered victims of the arch-villains were avenged; the ill-used wife saw the author of all her woes punished as he deserved—hanging limp and lifeless from the limb of the great tree near the very house in which she had suffered such mental agonies.

But another terrible tragedy was enacted soon after.

The abandoned mistress of the robber chief was frantic in her grief when she saw the guilty wretch swinging from the limb. She screamed terrible curses on the devoted heads of the executioners.

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the deserted wife. "I am avenged! I am avenged!"

"Wretch! traitress! murderess!" screamed the younger one. "You shall die for this!" and with the fury of a tigress she flew at her.

The maniac wife had considerable method in her madness. She drew a small dagger from the bosom of her dress, and quietly awaited the onset of her rival. The young woman, in her blind rage, did not see the dagger, and in another moment it was doing its terrible work. The maniac wife gave her a half dozen quick, furious stabs, and then saw her stagger backwards, screaming:

"Murder! murder!"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Jack, "she is stabbed!"

The guilty young woman was on the point of falling, when Jack rushed forward and caught her in his arms. She gasped and fell back in his arms in a death-agony.

The wife stood like one in a dream. Her eyes were riveted on the face of her rival, and blood was dripping from the dagger she held in her hand.

"What is it?" she asked, looking around.

"What's the matter with her? Is she ill?"

"She is dying," said Frank, gently taking the bloody dagger out of her hand. "Come away."

He led her to another room, and tried to soothe her.

"What ails her?" she asked, as Frank led her away.

"She has been hurt."

"Oh, yes! He killed her! He tried to kill me! Poor thing! Let me go to her! Let me go to her!"

"No—not now."

"My husband—where is he?"

"He is dead."

"No, no—not dead!"

"Yes; he was hung—you are avenged!"

"Who avenged me?"

"The sheriff came and hung him."

"Yes, yes, he was cruel to me," and the poor creature drew her hand across her eyes, as if trying to brush something away.

Frank succeeded in inducing her to lie down on a bed and go to sleep. She soon slept as sweetly as an infant.

Returning to the next room, Frank saw the pale, guilty paramour of the daring leader of the band of robbers breathe her last.

"Frank, this is awful," said Jack.

"Terrible," was the reply. "I am almost sorry I set out to break up this band. It is the bloodiest thing I ever undertook, but it will be a boon to the country, though."

"So it will, but I would rather some one else had undertaken the job."

"What shall we do now? It won't do to leave this poor demented woman here alone."

"There's another woman in the house."

"Well, we'll bury the dead out of sight and then leave."

The man Todd and faithful Pomp were set to work digging a grave for all the dead. It required a big hole, and several hours were lost in digging it. But it was finished at last, and the dead, women included, were consigned to it.

Then telling the other woman to take charge of everything on the place, and do as she pleased, the two heroes returned to the tricycle and prepared to leave.

"The next place is at the foot of the Red Hills," said Todd, "where the treasure is concealed in a cave."

"Can we reach there?"

"Yes, it's a very good road, winding in and out around the hills. Many wagons go there."

"Then we can go there, too."

The tricycle skurried across the rolling prairie like a bird on the wing. A small band of Indians saw it and gave chase. Frank let them come up and then asked them what they wanted.

"Want whisky," said the chief.

"Sorry I haven't got any for you," was the reply.

"Pale-face heap lie!" said the chief.

"Indian big fool!" replied Frank.

Of course there was a row. The red rascals thought they could get away with the four men in the cage, and so went to work to do it. It was the same old thing. They caught hold of the tricycle to stop it, and the electric current caught them.

They danced and howled till they were too weak to stand up. Then Frank released them, and they slunk away, too much used-up to want anything more.

"They won't forget that racket," said Frank, laughing.

"No. I am glad we did not kill any of them," said Jack, "for it has been one continuous slaughter ever since we struck the Indian country."

"That's true, Jack, but in every instance they commenced the business themselves."

"So they did. You have been in the right every time, Frank. But I imagine a sheriff will get sick of swinging men into eternity after awhile."

The tricycle was now on its way towards the Red Hills again. The Indians were gazing after it in wondering surprise till it was out of sight in the distance.

At last they struck the road that led toward the farm-house and the cave back among the hills.

"Just follow this road," said Todd, "and you'll reach the house all right. There may be a number of men there, but that will make but little difference."

They followed the road till they came to a bridge that spanned the stream.

"Halt there!" cried a man on the other side of the bridge, rifle in hand.

"What does this mean?" demanded Frank.

"This is a free country, and—"

"Halt, I say!"

The tricycle dashed across the bridge, and the man had to spring aside to avoid being run over.

But he was true to his trust, for he raised his rifle and fired at Frank.

The bullet fell harmless to the ground, and the next moment a shot from Pomp's revolver laid him low.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT THE LAST STAND.

LEAVING the dead robber sentinel where he fell by the little bridge the tricycle pushed up the hill towards the farm-house that now loomed up to view. It was a beautiful place, and

one would have been tempted to give great credit to the farmer who selected the spot for a home. Back of the house rose a series of abrupt hills that seemed to multiply as they receded in the distance.

The house itself was of a better class than the ordinary farm-house in the West. It was painted white, and had green Venetian blinds, and a broad veranda ran the entire length of the front. There was an air of comfort about the place that struck our heroes as being remarkable under the circumstances.

"This is decidedly a comfortable-looking place," remarked Frank to Jack.

"Just what I was thinking," said Jack as he looked around at the well-cultivated fields below the house.

"Yes," said Todd, "they made it a model farm, and one man was appointed to superintend and claim ownership. Those detailed to guard the cave were also to take turns in working in the field."

"But has the place never been suspected?"

"No. Government detectives have been here in search of the gang and were entertained, shown over the farm, and treated with a hospitality that pleased them beyond anything they had experienced in the West."

The tricycle approached the front gate.

"Ring the bell, Jack," ordered Frank.

Jack rang the bell with considerable vigor. Its clear silvery tones were heard by every soul on the premises. It was such an unusual sound, in that out-of-the-way place, that every one must need run to see about it.

Five men came running forward and stared at the strange vehicle in open-eyed wonder.

"Hello!" exclaimed Frank. "Whose place is this?"

"It's mine," said an elderly-looking man, stepping forward and peering through the wire cage at our hero. "Who are you?"

"We are travelers making a tour of the West. You have a fine farm here to be so far away from the market."

"We have no need of a market," was the reply. "We consume all we raise here, and have an abundance of all we want."

"You ought to be very contented, then, and—"

"So we are, my friend. Will you stop with us a day or two? I am quite anxious to understand what kind of a wagon you have here."

"Thank you, sir. As houses are many miles apart out here, we will avail ourselves of your offer. Will you be so kind, all of you, as to take hold and pull us back about twenty feet? We are too far forward here. There take hold of the bar there, or by the wheels. All ready, now?"

"Yes—all ready!" returned the farmer, as he and his four assistants laid hold of the wheels to push the tricycle back as requested.

Frank then turned on the electric current. The five men caught the full force of it, and in another moment were howling like so many Comanche Indians in a free fight. The subtle current doubled them up till their hair stood on end and their eyes seemed about to pop out of their heads.

"Now we've got 'em!" cried Frank. "Jump out and disarm 'em, Pomp. Be careful and use only one hand at a time or you'll get shocked yourself."

"I'll get out and help him," said Jack, and the two sprang out of the tricycle together and began disarming the five men. Each man was found to be in possession of a bowie-knife and revolver, rather a formidable outfit for farm laborers.

During the process of disarming the men squirmed and yelled as if in mortal agony. Pain and terror were plainly depicted on their faces. They could not understand the mysterious power that held them with such relentless force.

"Now I'll knock 'em senseless," said Frank, "and then you can tie them up."

He gave them an additional shock and the next moment they dropped to the ground unconscious.

"Now tie 'em up."

Jack and Pomp soon had them tied hard and

fast, and left them lying on the ground. At that moment two women, who had been witnesses of the scene from a window of the house, rushed forward, their pallid faces indicating the greatest alarm.

"Oh, my husband! My husband!" cried one of them, as she ran forward. "You have killed him!"

"No—he is in nowise hurt, ma'am," said Jack. "He is only tied up, and will come to in a few minutes."

"Oh, you've killed him!" she frantically screamed. "Let me go to him!"

Jack prevented her from throwing herself on the unconscious man.

"Madam," he said, "would we take the trouble to bind dead men? They will be all right in a few minutes."

"But what are you going to do?" the woman demanded.

"Break up this band of robbers, ma'am," replied Frank, emerging from the tricycle.

Both women gasped and staggered as if struck.

"That—means—death—to all," said the elderly one, in husky tones.

"I don't know about that, ma'am," replied Frank. "The band has caused the death of many an innocent man. But the majority of its members have already been wiped out. We do not desire to shed any more blood, and will not, unless forced to do so. These men are our prisoners, and those in the cave must surrender or take the— Hold on there, ma'am! You must not go to warn them of danger!"

The younger of the two women had started to run toward the house. She did not stop at Frank's command, so he darted forward in pursuit, and overtook her just before she reached the veranda. Throwing an arm around her waist he detained her, saying:

"Madam, will you be quiet, or must we tie you up too? You can do nothing except to make trouble for yourself."

"My God!" she exclaimed, burying her face in her hands, "we are ruined!"

"The band is certainly ruined, if that is what you mean; but you ladies will not be troubled if you do not commit any act that shows you to be equally guilty with the men."

"I—I will do as you say," said the terrified woman.

"Very well, then. You shall not be disturbed. Sit down here on the steps and wait till we can decide what to do. Can you tell me how many men there are in the cave?"

"Yes; there are only two in there now," was the reply.

"Can they be called out?"

"No, sir; they have to remain inside until the relief-guard goes in to relieve them."

"I understand. We'll have to use some kind of strategy to bring them out. Will you keep your seat here, until I return?"

"Yes, sir."

Frank left her and went back to the tricycle, where Jack and Pomp were standing guard over the five men who were lying bound on the ground.

The man Todd still remained in the tricycle. "Todd," said Frank, "come out and see if you can't work these fellows out of the cave for us."

Todd came out. The men on the ground were recovering consciousness very fast.

The farmer was the first one to speak.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"It means you are gone up," said Jack, very promptly.

"Who are you?"

"Can't you guess? You are all that is left of the band. Ball and the others have been wiped out."

"What are you going to do with us?"

"That depends upon the amount of trouble we have in getting into the cave!"

"You—can't—get—into—the cave!"

"I think I can," said Frank.

"You will be shot down."

"No—I will guard against that. How many men are in there?"

"Ten men, all armed to the teeth."

Frank looked hard at the man.

"You have a hard cheek to lie to me under such circumstances," he remarked. "There are but two men in the cave. It does not require ten men to guard it. Pomp, stand guard here till we return. Jack, you and Todd come with me."

Jack and Todd went with him and Pomp remained to guard the men.

CHAPTER XXVI.

'CAPTURE OF THE ROBBERS' CAVE.

THE three men then marched around the house, and followed a path that led off in the direction of a bold bluff that rose abruptly above the farm about two hundred yards in the rear of the houses.

"How many men do you think are in there, Todd?" Frank asked.

"Only two, I reckon, as that's the regular guard."

"How can we get them out?"

"I don't know. I will show you the entrance to the cave, and then you may devise some plan to get into it."

They pushed their way along the path till they came in sight of the entrance to the cave. It was a fissure in the face of the rocky bluff, which ran up some thirty feet or more, and was about three feet wide.

"There it is," said Todd. "We must not let the guard see us."

The three men kept back out of sight from the guard, who were evidently inside the cave, and waited for some time to see if the guard would come out.

"I think I know a plan that will bring 'em out," suggested Jack.

"What is it?" the young inventor asked.

"Bring the tricycle up to within thirty or forty yards of the cave and ring the bell. That will bring 'em out unless they have been warned of our presence."

"Hanged if I don't believe you're right, Jack. You and Todd stay here till I come back."

Frank hastened back to the tricycle, where Pomp was standing guard over the five prostrate men. The prisoners were swearing like so many pirates, and Pomp was grinning from ear to ear at their profanity.

"Now, look here," said Frank, turning to the prisoners, "if you give us any trouble, you will be wiped out without the least hesitation. You had better keep quiet and be civil. Shoot any one that gives you trouble, Pomp."

"Yes, sah."

Frank then took a glance around, and saw a wagon gate on the upper side of the lot. This he opened and then entered the tricycle. To move it round and guide it through the gate was the work of but a few minutes. He ran it along the path to where Jack and Todd were concealed, took them aboard, and then pushed on to a spot within twenty paces of the entrance to the cave, and directly in front of it. There he halted. They had a plain view of the great fissure in the rock.

"That's the entrance," said Todd in a whisper.

"Get your rifle, Jack," whispered Frank.

Jack procured his weapon, and Frank did likewise.

"Now, Todd, you ring the bell."

Todd rang the bell violently.

As was expected, the two guards, astounded at hearing a bell where they had never heard one before, ran out of the cave, rifles in hand, and stared at the tricycle.

Their first impression was that some members of the band had returned from the plains with a strange capture. As they were gazing at it Frank and Jack covered them with their Winchester.

"Drop your guns and hold up your hands," commanded Frank, in a very stern tone of voice.

"Jump for shelter, Jim!" cried one of the two men, and instantly both men wheeled and made a dash for the cave.

Crack!

Crack!

Frank and Jack both fired, and the two rob-

bers fell, shot in their backs, within a few feet of the entrance to the cave!

"That ends it!" exclaimed Todd.

"Yes; I hated to shoot them," said Frank; "but if they had gone back in there they could have kept us at bay for a long time. You have been inside, have you, Todd?"

"Many a time," was the reply.

"Come on, then, and show us where the treasure is."

Todd led the way, stepping over the bodies of the two guards, who had died almost instantly from their wounds, and entered the cave. Frank and Jack followed him. They held their revolvers cocked in their hands, for fear of treachery, or other robbers being concealed in the cavern.

The entrance led along some thirty or forty feet, as if the great rock had been rent by some convulsion of nature; then it widened into a large cavern. The floor seemed to have been made level by filling in uneven places with loose earth. From a lamp which hung in the center an uncertain light was thrown on many objects around. Bales of goods and many boxes of treasure were seen piled about on three sides.

"All those contain valuable goods," said Todd, pointing to the bales and boxes. "In that iron chest over there is the gold and silver belonging to the band."

Frank went to the chest and examined it. He found it securely locked. An ax lay near it. Taking it up he dealt the padlock several tremendous blows. A half dozen blows demolished it.

Throwing up the lid, a glittering pile of gold and silver coin greeted our hero's eyes.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Jack. "Your fortune is made, Frank!"

"So is yours, Jack!" returned the young inventor.

"How much do you think is here, Todd?"

"Many thousands of dollars," replied the informer. "But just how much I have no means of knowing. They have been accumulating it for years."

"Well, it's a big haul. I hardly know what to do with it."

"Take it, of course," said the former robber.

"But I don't know that I have the right to do that."

"There's no one else who can prove any claim to it, for those from whom it was taken were silenced forever at the time of the robbery."

"Then we will take possession of it," Frank said, "and the goods we will turn over to the authorities. We will give you enough to commence life anew, Todd. So you stay here with Jack till I come back. I am going to decide what to do with the five prisoners outside."

"What can you do with 'em, Frank?" Jack Middleton asked.

"I am thinking of going to the nearest United States army post, and ask the military to take charge of them and these goods."

"In that case you had better secure your coin first," suggested Todd, "or you will lose it altogether."

"Yes," added Jack; "I think so too."

"Then let's take it and put it in one of the chests in the tricycle."

Frank went out and moved the tricycle close up to the entrance, and the three men then went to work, transferring the gold and silver coin to the chest of the cage which had been used for provisions and cooking utensils. They carried it out in their hats, and had to make many trips each ere it was all removed.

"Now," said Frank, as he closed and locked the chest, "I will go back to the prisoners and have a talk with them. I may have to run over to the nearest military station for assistance."

"There is a small fort down on the river about eighty miles from here," said Todd.

"Southward from here?"

"Yes."

"I can reach it in two hours. You two stay here till I come back."

Frank entered the tricycle and moved away. At the gate he told Pomp to keep his prisoners where they were, and to shoot any one who

gave him trouble. Then he moved off at a rapid pace, and was soon lost to view by the timber down on the creek.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

AFTER crossing the little bridge over the creek the young inventor sent the tricycle flying over the level prairie at full speed. With no one but himself on board, the wonderful machine fairly flew like a bird, barely touching the ground, apparently. Ten miles passed, and then the hero caught a glimpse of a body of horsemen ahead of him.

"Indians," he muttered to himself. "I have no time to fool with them. I'll dash past them at full speed and give them something to think about."

He soon came nearer to them.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, as he got a better view of the strangers. "They are Uncle Sam's cavalry, or my eyes are deceiving me! Yes, they are boys in blue—a whole company of them. Hurrah! I'm in luck!"

He went dashing up to the company of astonished soldiers, who were wondering what on earth the tricycle could be.

"Hello, captain!" he yelled, as he came to a halt. "I am looking for you!"

The captain rode up and peered through the wire cage at him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Frank Reade, Jr., the young inventor," he replied.

"Oh, yes, we have all heard of you, Mr. Reade. But what in thunder is this thing you've got here?"

"An electric tricycle," replied Frank, "with a bullet-proof cage to protect me from danger. We have broken up and destroyed the band of road-agents in this section. To-day we succeeded in capturing the cave containing all the proceeds of their robberies, together with five prisoners. They are all that's left of the band, I think. I was going to the fort below to get assistance, but now I will turn everything over to you."

"You astonish me, Mr. Reade!" exclaimed the captain.

"Yes, it is astonishing, but then, with this cage, which no bullet can penetrate, three of us armed with Winchester can do wonders. We could wipe out your whole command in a few minutes. Then we could make thirty miles an hour over the plains."

"Impossible!"

"Not at all. I came up to you at that rate just now. Will you come and take charge of the prisoners and the plunder found in the cave?"

"Yes. How far is it from here?"

"About ten miles, I think."

"Lead on, then, and we will follow."

"Give your horse to an orderly and ride with me, captain."

The officer gave his second-in-command directions to follow the tricycle, dismounted, gave his horse in charge of an orderly, and then entered the cage with Frank.

Of course he was amazed at the wonderful invention. He asked a thousand questions, and soon learned what an immense power it gave the young inventor over an enemy on the plains.

They reached the farm-house in two hours, and found Pomp standing guard over the five prisoners, and Jack and Todd in charge of the cave.

On seeing the military the two women retired into the house, and left the prisoners to their fate.

Captain Long took charge of them, relieving Pomp, and placed them under a strong guard. Then he went to the cave and put a strong guard there. An examination revealed many thousands of dollars' worth of goods. Those he took charge of.

"I found a considerable amount of coin in here," remarked Frank to the captain, "and that I have taken as my share of the capture."

"I believe you are entitled to it, Mr. Reade," returned the captain.

"So I thought. Now I shall leave everything in your charge and leave."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going down to the White River settlement, where some friends have recently settled."

"Very well. I shall report your gallant conduct to the colonel commanding the department."

"Thanks. Tell him the band is wiped out, and that the electric tricycle can lick anything on the plains, white, red or black."

The captain laughed and shook hands with him.

Jack, Pomp and Todd then got into the tricycle with him and moved off. Todd wanted to go as far as White River, where he would take a horse, make his way to the Pacific Railroad, and thence to California.

That night they encamped near the farm-house where the captain of the road-agents had been wiped out, and the next morning resumed their journey. It was a fine level country for two hundred miles, and our heroes had a fine run. They passed a small body of red-skins, who gave chase, but they were left so far behind that they thought some strange enchantment had come over them.

They reached the White River settlement that night, and were welcomed with glad shouts by the settlers. Nellie Hammond came out and gave the young inventor a shy, blushing greeting that made his heart flutter like a bird in a cage.

The next day Frank gave Todd a thousand dollars in gold and a horse, saying:

"You filled your agreement with us like a man. You have the making of a good man in

you, Todd. I hope you intend to be one henceforth."

"Indeed I do, sir," said the ex-robber, "and never intend to do anything wrong again. I shall go to California and begin life anew."

They shook hands with him, and he rode away in a northerly direction.

"There goes a man," said Frank, gazing after the receding form of the ex-robber, "who will have something to conceal and think about in his old age."

"Yes, and I guess it will make a better man of him," remarked Jack Middleton.

"Dat's er fac'," added Pomp. "An' he won't forgit it, neder."

After spending a few days with the settlers on White River, Frank began to make preparations to return home. Nellie Hammond exacted a promise from him to return the next summer and spend a month in hunting and fishing in that Paradise of hunters and fishermen. He gave the promise, and the little maiden was happy.

The next day they started, followed by the cheers and good-wishes of the whole village.

Five days later they reached Readestown, taking the people by surprise, as when the tricycle first struck the town. His father and mother received him with a glad welcome, and the townspeople showered all three of them with questions about their adventures.

After a few days of rest Frank sat down and wrote a long letter to the young woman in Pittsburgh, detailing all the particulars about the dying confession of the robber who had stolen her diamonds and left his rival's handkerchief in her room. This he inclosed in a box with the jewelry and sent by express to her address.

A week later he received a letter from the young lady, full of gushing thanks, saying the return of the jewels and the accompanying confession of the robber had caused her to send for her lover. He read the confession, and then she threw herself in his arms and begged his forgiveness. He forgave all, and then their engagement was renewed. Thus were two loving hearts made happy by our hero.

The news that the band of road-agents had been destroyed reached the public through the report of Captain Long, of the United States army. Frank and Jack had said nothing about it to any one except to the father of our hero.

It made him a still greater hero with all who knew him, and the electric tricycle became the greatest wonder of the day.

The invention Jack Middleton had hastened back from Europe to suggest to our hero next engaged his attention, and with that we leave him.

The good effects of the severe chastisement the tricycle had inflicted on the Indians of the plains were seen long afterwards, for the reds never forgot the young inventor and his LATEST INVENTION.

[THE END.]

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